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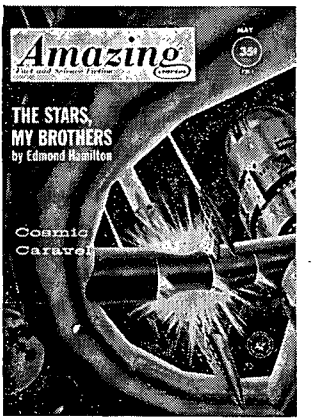

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STORIES OF IMAGINATION

MAY 1962

Volume 11 Number 5

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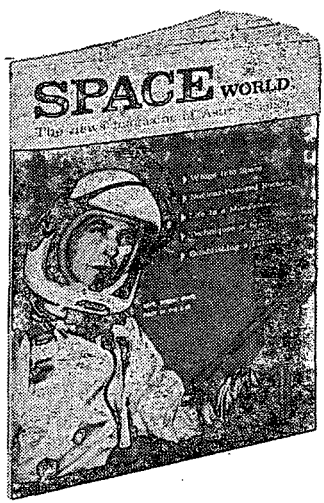

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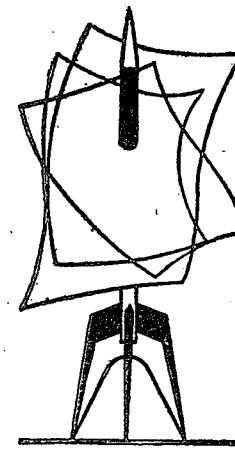

EDITORIAL

AS I write this, we are but a few days shy of an astronomical configuration which has not occurred for several thousand years. Five planets—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—along with the Sun and the Moon, are lined up in a 16-degree wedge of the celestial zodiac. All about us occultists are predicting everything from earthquakes and eruptions to rebellions and nuclear wars, from the arrival of aliens to the end of the world. If you are reading this peacefully in the quiet of your room, you will know that they were wrong. If you are not . . .

* * *

AS some of you who write us letters pleading for a fanzine column may know, we try to stay neutral on this point. However, there has just arrived on our desk a copy of a fascinating and (for new fen, especially) useful publication called *A Key to the Terminology of S-F Fandom*, by Donald Franson, and published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation. It is a dictionary of several hundred fan terms, among them some that even we had not been clear about. For instance:

Blog—Mythical drink of fans; any potable consisting of an incredible mismatch of ingredients.

Faaan—Fan who is interested more in fans and fandom than in stf.

Fafia—Forced away from it all by mundane considerations. (That's us.)

Pamphlet is available at 20¢ from Ron Ellik, 1825 Greenfield Ave., Los Angeles 25, Calif.

* * *

IF you can bear another plug, some of you may be interested to know that NL has written a book which is, most likely, now on sale at your local bookstore. It is called *Is Anybody Happy? A Study of the American Search for Pleasure*, and has nothing to do with sf or fantasy. It is strictly mainstream non-fiction, but you might like it anyway. It is all about how Americans strive for fun, but actually have very little of it. If you go so far as to buy it and read it, let me know what you think of it. —NL.

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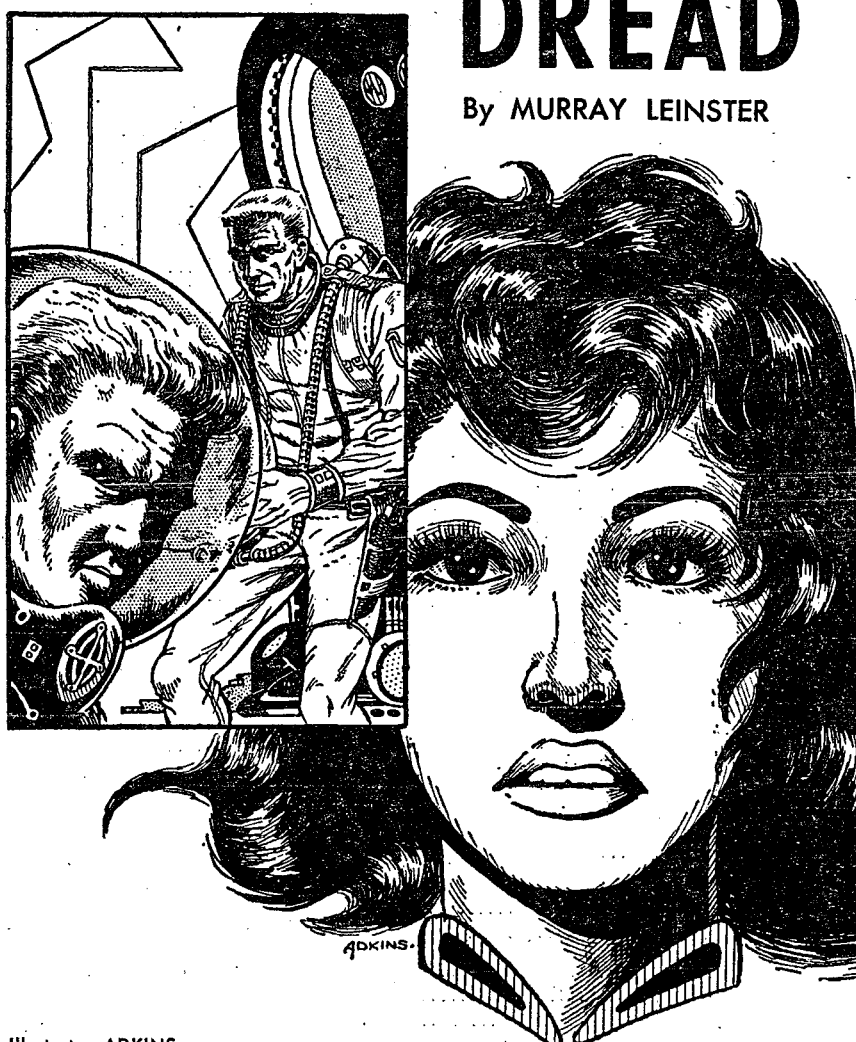
PLANET of DREAD

By MURRAY LEINSTER



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Moran cut apart the yard-long monstrosity with a slash of flame. The thing presumably died, but it continued to writhe senselessly. He turned to see other horrors crawling toward him. Then he knew he was being marooned on a planet of endless terrors.

I.

MORAN, naturally, did not mean to help in the carrying out of the plans which would mean his destruction one way or another. The plans were thrashed out very painstakingly, in formal conference on the space-yacht *Nadine*, with Moran present and allowed to take part in the discussion. From the viewpoint of the *Nadine's* ship's company, it was simply necessary to get rid of Moran. In their predicament he might have come to the same conclusion; but he was not at all enthusiastic about their decision. He would die of it.

The *Nadine* was out of overdrive and all the uncountable suns of the galaxy shone steadily, remotely, as infinitesimal specks of light of every color of the rainbow. Two hours since, the sun of this solar system had been a vast glaring disk off to port, with streamers and prominences erupting about its edges.

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Now it lay astern, and Moran could see the planet that had been chosen for his marooning. It was a cloudy world. There were some dim markings near one lighted limb, but nowhere else. There was an ice-cap in view. The rest was—clouds.

THE ice-cap, by its existence and circular shape, proved that the planet rotated at a not unreasonable rate. The fact that it was water-ice told much. A water-ice ice-cap said that there were no poisonous gases in the planet's atmosphere. Sulfur dioxide or chlorine, for example, would not allow the formation of water-ice. It would have to be sulphuric-acid or hydrochloric-acid ice. But the ice-cap was simple snow. Its size, too, told about temperature-distribution on the planet. A large cap would have meant a large area with arctic and sub-arctic temperatures, with small temperate and tropical climate-belts. A small one like this meant wide tropical and sub-tropical zones. The fact was verified by the thick, dense cloud-masses which covered most of the surface,—all the surface, in fact, outside the ice-cap. But since there were ice-caps there would be temperate regions. In short, the ice-cap proved that a man could endure the air and temperature conditions he would find.

MORAN observed these things from the control-room of the *Nadine*, then approaching the world on planetary drive. He was to be left here, with no reason ever to expect rescue. Two of the *Nadine*'s four-man crew watched out the same ports as the planet seemed to approach. Burleigh said encouragingly;

"It doesn't look too bad, Moran!"

Moran disagreed, but he did not answer. He cocked an ear instead. He heard something. It was a thin, wabbling, keening whine. No natural radiation sounds like that. Moran nodded toward the all-band speaker.

"Do you hear what I do?" he asked sardonically.

Burleigh listened. A distinctly artificial signal came out of the speaker. It wasn't a voice-signal. It wasn't an identification beacon, such as are placed on certain worlds for the convenience of interstellar skippers who need to check their courses on extremely long runs. This was something else.

Burleigh said;

"Hm . . . Call the others, Harper."

Harper, prudently with him in the control-room, put his head into the passage leading away. He called. But Moran observed with grudging respect that he didn't give him a chance to do anything drastic. These people

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on the *Nadine* were capable. They'd managed to recapture the *Nadine* from him, but they were matter-of-fact about it. They didn't seem to resent what he'd tried to do, or that he'd brought them an indefinite distance in an indefinite direction from their last landing-point, and they had still to relocate themselves.

THEY'd been on Coryus Three and they'd gotten departure clearance from its space-port. With clearance-papers in order, they could land unquestioned at any other space-port and take off again—provided the other space-port was one they had clearance for. Without rigid control of space-travel, any criminal anywhere could escape the consequences of any crime simply by buying a ticket to another world. Moran couldn't have bought a ticket, but he'd tried to get off the planet Coryus on the *Nadine*. The trouble was that the *Nadine* had clearance papers covering five persons aboard—four men and a girl Carol. Moran made six. Wherever the yacht landed, such a disparity between its documents and its crew would spark an investigation. A lengthy, incredibly minute investigation. Moran, at least, would be picked out as a fugitive from Coryus Three. The others were fugitives too, from some unnamed world Moran did not know. They might be sent back where they came from. In effect, with six people on board instead of five, the *Nadine* could not land anywhere for supplies. With five on board, as her papers declared, she could. And Moran was the extra man whose presence would rouse space-port officials' suspicion of the rest. So he had to be dumped.

He couldn't blame them. He'd made another difficulty, too. Blaster in hand, he'd made the *Nadine* take off from Coryus III with a trip-tape picked at random for guidance. But the trip-tape had been computed for another starting-point, and when the yacht came out of overdrive it was because the drive had been dismantled in the engine-room. So the ship's location was in doubt. It could have travelled at almost any speed in practically any direction for a length of time that was at least indefinite. A liner could re-locate itself without trouble. It had elaborate observational equipment and tri-di star-charts. But smaller craft had to depend on the Galactic Directory. The process would be to find a planet and check its climate and relationship to other planets, and its flora and fauna against descriptions in the Directory. That was the way to find out where one was, when one's position became doubtful. The *Nadine* needed to make a planet-fall for this.

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The rest of the ship's company came into the control-room. Burleigh waved his hand at the speaker.

"Listen!"

THEY heard it. All of them. It was a trilling, whining sound among the innumerable random noises to be heard in supposedly empty space.

"That's a marker," Carol announced. "I saw a costume-story tape once that had that sound in it. It marked a first-landing spot on some planet or other, so the people could find that spot again. It was supposed to be a long time ago, though."

"It's weak," observed Burleigh. "We'll try answering it."

Moran stirred, and he knew that every one of the others was conscious of the movement. But they didn't watch him suspiciously. They were alert by long habit. Burleigh said they'd been Underground people, fighting the government of their native world, and they'd gotten away to make it seem the revolt had collapsed. They'd go back later when they weren't expected, and start it up again. Moran considered the story probable. Only people accustomed to desperate actions would have remained so calm when Moran had used desperate measures against them.

Burleigh picked up the transmitter-microphone.

"Calling ground," he said briskly. "Calling ground! We pick up your signal. Please reply."

He repeated the call, over and over and over. There was no answer. Cracklings and hissings came out of the speaker as before, and the thin and reedy wabbling whine continued. The *Nadine* went on toward the enlarging cloudy mass ahead.

Burleigh said;

"Well?"

"I think," said Carol, "that we should land. People have been here. If they left a beacon, they may have left an identification of the planet. Then we'd know where we are and how to get to Loris."

Burleigh nodded. The *Nadine* had cleared for Loris. That was where it should make its next landing. The little yacht went on. All five of its proper company watched as the planet's surface enlarged. The ice-cap went out of sight around the bulge of the globe, but no markings appeared. There were cloud-banks everywhere, probably low down in the atmosphere. The darker vague areas previously seen might have been highlands.

"I think," said Carol, to Moran, "that if it's too tropical where this signal's coming from, we'll take you somewhere near enough to the ice-cap to have an endurable climate. I've been fig-

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uring on food, too. That will depend on where we are from Loris because we have to keep enough for ourselves. But we can spare some. We'll give you the emergency-kit, anyhow."

THE emergency-kit contained antiseptics, seeds, and a weapon or two, with elaborate advice to castaways. If somebody were wrecked on an even possibly habitable plane, the especially developed seed-strains would provide food in a minimum of time. It was not an encouraging thought, though, and Moran grimaced.

She hadn't said anything about being sorry that he had to be marooned. Maybe she was, but rebels learn to be practical or they don't live long. Moran wondered, momentarily, what sort of world they came from and why they had revolted, and what sort of set-back to the revolt had sent the five off in what they considered a strategic retreat but their government would think defeat. Moran's own situation was perfectly clear.

He'd killed a man on Coryus III. His victim would not be mourned by anybody, and somebody formerly in very great danger would now be safe, which was the reason for what Moran had done. But the dead man had been very important, and the fact that Moran had forced him to fight and killed him in fair combat made no difference. Moran had needed to get off-planet, and fast. But space-travel regulations are especially designed to prevent such escapes.

He'd made a pretty good try, at that. One of the controls on space-traffic required a ship on landing to deposit its fuel-block in the space-port's vaults. The fuel-block was not returned until clearance for departure had been granted. But Moran had waylaid the messenger carrying the *Nadine*'s fuel-block back to that space-yacht. He'd knocked the messenger cold and presented himself at the yacht with the fuel. He was admitted. He put the block in the engine's gate. He duly took the plastic receipt-token the engine only then released, and he drew a blaster. He'd locked two of the *Nadine*'s crew in the engine-room, rushed to the control-room without encountering the others, dogged the door shut, and threaded in the first trip-tape to come to hand. He punched the take-off button and only seconds later the overdrive. Then the yacht—and Moran—was away. But his present companions got the drive dismantled two days later and once the yacht was out of overdrive they efficiently gave him his choice of surrendering or else. He surrendered, stipulating that he wouldn't be landed back on

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Coryus; he still clung to hope of avoiding return—which was almost certain anyhow. Because nobody would want to go back to a planet from which they'd carried away a criminal, even though they'd done it unwillingly. Investigation of such a matter might last for months.

Now the space-yacht moved toward a vast mass of fleecy whiteness without any visible features. Harper stayed with the direction-finder. From time to time he gave readings requiring minute changes of course. The wabbling, whining signal was louder now. It became louder than all the rest of the space-noises together.

THE yacht touched atmosphere and Burleigh said;

"Watch our height, Carol."

She stood by the echometer. Sixty miles. Fifty. Thirty. A correction of course. Fifteen miles to surface below. Ten. Five. At twenty-five thousand feet there were clouds, which would be particles of ice so small that they floated even so high. Then clear air, then lower clouds, and lower ones still. It was not until six thousand feet above the surface that the planet-wide cloud-level seemed to begin. From there on down it was pure opacity. Anything could exist in that dense, almost palpable grayness. There could be jagged peaks.

The *Nadine* went down and down. At fifteen hundred feet above the unseen surface, the clouds ended. Below, there was only haze. One could see the ground, at least, but there was no horizon. There was only an end to visibility. The yacht descended as if in the center of a sphere in which one could see clearly nearby, less clearly at a little distance, and not at all beyond a quarter-mile or so.

There was a shaded, shadowless twilight under the cloud-bank. The ground looked like no ground ever seen before by anyone. Off to the right a rivulet ran between improbable-seeming banks. There were a few very small hills of most unlikely appearance. It was the ground, the matter on which one would walk, which was strangest. It had color, but the color was not green. Much of it was a pallid, dirty-yellowish white. But there were patches of blue, and curious veinings of black, and here and there were other colors, all of them unlike the normal color of vegetation on a planet with a sol-type sun.

Harper spoke from the direction-finder;

"The signal's coming from that mound, yonder."

There was a hillock of elongated shape directly in line with the *Nadine's* course in descent. Except for the patches of color,

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it was the only considerable landmark within the half-mile circle in which anything could be seen at all.

The *Nadine* checked her downward motion. Interplanetary drive is rugged and sure, but it does not respond to fine adjustment. Burleigh used rockets, issuing great bellowings of flame, to make actual contact. The yacht hovered, and as the rocket-flames diminished slowly she sat down with practically no impact at all. But around her there was a monstrous tumult of smoke and steam. When the rockets went off, she lay in a burned-out hollow some three or four feet deep with a bottom of solid stone. The walls of the hollow were black and scorched. It seemed that at some places they quivered persistently.

There was silence in the control-room save for the whining noise which now was almost deafening. Harper snapped off the switch. Then there was true silence. The space-yacht had come to rest possibly a hundred yards from the mound which was the source of the space-signal. That mound shared the peculiarity of the ground as far as they could see through the haze. It was not vegetation in any ordinary sense. Certainly it was no mineral surface! The landing-pockets had burned away three or four feet of it, and the edge of the burned area smoked noisesomely, and somehow it looked as if it would reek. And there were places where it stirred.

Burleigh blinked and stared. Then he reached up and flicked on the outside microphones. Instantly there was bedlam. If the landscape was strange, here, the sounds that came from it were unbelievable.

THERE were grunting noises. There were clickings, uncountable clickings that made a background for all the rest. There were discordant howls and honkings. From time to time some thing unknown made a cry that sounded very much like a small boy trailing a stick against a picket fence, only much louder. Something hooted, maintaining the noise for an impossibly long time. And persistently, sounding as if they came from far away, there were booming noises, unspeakably deep-bass, made by something alive. And something shrieked in lunatic fashion and something else still moaned from time to time with the volume of a steam-whistle. . . .

"This sounds and looks like a nice place to live," said Moran with fine irony.

Burleigh did not answer. He turned down the outside sound.

"What's that stuff there, the ground?" he demanded. "We burned it away in landing. I've

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seen something like it somewhere, but never taking the place of grass!"

"That," said Moran as if brightly, "that's what I'm to make a garden in. Of evenings I'll stroll among my thrifty plantings and listen to the delightful sounds of nature."

Burleigh scowled. Harper flicked off the direction-finder.

"The signal still comes from that hillock yonder," he said with finality.

Moran said bitingly;

"That ain't no hillock, that's my home!"

Then, instantly he'd said it, he recognized that it could be true. The mound was not a fold in the ground. It was not an up-cropping of the ash-covered stone on which the *Nadine* rested. The enigmatic, dirty-yellow-dirty-red - dirty - blue-and-dirty-black ground-cover hid something. It blurred the shape it covered, very much as enormous cobwebs made solid and opaque would have done. But when one looked carefully at the mound, there was a landing-fin sticking up toward the leaden skies. It was attached to a large cylindrical object of which the fore part was crushed in. The other landing-fins could be traced.

"It's a ship," said Moran curtly. "It crash-landed and its crew set up a signal to call for help. None came, or they'd have turned the beacon off. Maybe they got the lifeboats to work and got away. Maybe they lived as I'm expected to live until they died as I'm expected to die."

Burleigh said angrily;

"You'd do what we are doing if you were in our shoes!"

"Sure," said Moran, "but a man can gripe, can't he?"

"You won't have to live here," said Burleigh. "We'll take you somewhere up by the ice-cap. As Carol said, we'll give you everything we can spare. And meanwhile we'll take a look at that wreck yonder. There might be an indication in it of what solar system this is. There could be something in it of use to you, too. You'd better come along when we explore."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Moran with irony. "Very kind of you, sir. You'll go armed, sir?"

Burleigh growled;

"Naturally!"

"Then since I can't be trusted with a weapon," said Moran, "I suggest that I take a torch. We may have to burn through that loathesome stuff to get in the ship."

"Right," growled Burleigh again. "Brawn and Carol, you'll keep ship. The rest of us wear suits. We don't know what that stuff is outside."

MORAN silently went to the space-suit rack and began

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to get into a suit. Modern space-suits weren't like the ancient crudities with bulging metal casings and enormous globular helmets. Non-stretch fabrics took the place of metal, and constant-volume joints were really practical nowadays. A man could move about in a late-model space-suit almost as easily as in ship-clothing. The others of the landing-party donned their special garments with the brisk absence of fumbling that these people displayed in every action.

"If there's a lifeboat left," said Carol suddenly, "Moran might be able to do something with it."

"Ah, yes!" said Moran. "It's very likely that the ship hit hard enough to kill everybody aboard, but not smash the boats!"

"Somebody survived the crash," said Burleigh, "because they set up a beacon. I wouldn't count on a boat, Moran."

"I don't!" snapped Moran.

He flipped the fastener of his suit. He felt all the openings catch. He saw the others complete their equipment. They took arms. So far they had seen no moving thing outside, but arms were simple sanity on an unknown world. Moran, though, would not be permitted a weapon. He picked up a torch. They filed into the airlock. The inner door closed. The outer door opened. It was not necessary to check the air specifically. The suits would take care of that. Anyhow the ice-cap said there were no water-soluble gases in the atmosphere, and a gas can't be an active poison if it can't dissolve.

They filed out of the airlock. They stood on ash-covered stone, only slightly eroded by the processes which made life possible on this planet. They looked dubiously at the scorched, indefinite substance which had been ground before the *Nadine* landed. Moran moved scornfully forward. He kicked at the burnt stuff. His foot went through the char. The hole exposed a cheesy mass of soft matter which seemed riddled with small holes.

Something black came squirming frantically out of one of the openings. It was eight or ten inches long. It had a head, a thorax, and an abdomen. It had wing-cases. It had six legs. It toppled down to the stone on which the *Nadine* rested. Agitatedly, it spread its wing-covers and flew away, droning loudly. The four men heard the sound above even the monstrous cacophony of cries and boomings and grunts and squeaks which seemed to fill the air.

"What the devil—."

Moran kicked again. More holes. More openings. More small tunnels in the cheese-like, curd-like stuff. More black things squirming to view in obvious

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panic. They popped out everywhere. It was suddenly apparent that the top of the soil, here, was a thick and blanket-like sheet over the whitish stuff. The black creatures lived and thrived in tunnels under it.

CAROL's voice came over the helmet-phones.

"They're—bugs!" she said incredulously. *"They're beetles! They're twenty times the size of the beetles we humans have been carrying around the galaxy, but that's what they are!"*

Moran grunted. Distastefully, he saw his predicament made worse. He knew what had happened here. He could begin to guess at other things to be discovered. It had not been practical for men to move onto new planets and subsist upon the flora and fauna they found there. On some new planets life had never gotten started. On such worlds a highly complex operation was necessary before humanity could move in. A complete ecological complex had to be built up; microbes to break down the rock for soil, bacteria to fix nitrogen to make the soil fertile; plants to grow in the new-made dirt and insects to fertilize the plants so they would multiply, and animals and birds to carry the seeds planet-wide. On most planets, to be sure, there were local, aboriginal plants and animals. But still terrestrial creatures had to be introduced if a colony was to feed itself. Alien plants did not supply satisfactory food. So an elaborate adaptation job had to be done on every planet before native and terrestrial living things settled down together. It wasn't impossible that the scuttling things were truly beetles, grown large and monstrous under the conditions of a new planet. And the ground . . .

"This ground stuff," said Moran distastefully, "is yeast or some sort of toadstool growth. This is a seedling world. It didn't have any life on it, so somebody dumped germs and spores and bugs to make it ready for plants and animals eventually. But nobody's come back to finish up the job."

Burleigh grunted a somehow surprised assent. But it wasn't surprising; not wholly so. Once one mentioned yeasts and toadstools and fungi generally, the weird landscape became less than incredible. But it remained actively unpleasant to think of being marooned on it.

"Suppose we go look at the ship?" said Moran unpleasantly. "Maybe you can find out where you are, and I can find out what's ahead of me."

He climbed up on the unscorched surface. It was elastic. The parchment-like top skin

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yielded. It was like walking on a mass of springs.

"We'd better spread out," added Moran, "or else we'll break through that skin and be floundering in this mess."

"I'm giving the orders, Moran!" said Burleigh shortly. "But what you say does make sense."

HE and the others joined Moran on the yielding surface. Their footing was uncertain, as on a trampoline. They staggered. They moved toward the hillock which was a covered-over wrecked ship.

The ground was not as level as it appeared from the *Nadine's* control-room. There were undulations. But they could not see more than a quarter-mile in any direction. Beyond that was mist. But Burleigh, at one end of the uneven line of advancing men, suddenly halted and stood staring down at something he had not seen before. The others halted.

Something moved. It came out from behind a very minor spire of whitish stuff that looked like a dirty sheet stretched over a tall stone. The thing that appeared was very peculiar indeed. It was a—worm. But it was a foot thick and ten feet long, and it had a group of stumpy legs at its fore end—where there were eyes hidden behind bristling hair-like growths—and another set of feet at its tail end. It progressed sedately by reaching forward with its fore-part, securing a foothold, and then arching its middle portion like a cat arching its back, to bring its hind part forward. Then it reached forward again. It was of a dark olive color from one end to the other. Its manner of walking was insane but somehow sedate.

Moran heard muffled noises in his helmet-phone as the others tried to speak. Carol's voice came anxiously;

"What's the matter? What do you see?"

Moran said with savage precision;

"We're looking at an inchworm, grown up like the beetles only more so. It's not an inchworm any longer. It's a yardworm." Then he said harshly to the men with him; "It's not a hunting creature on worlds where it's smaller. It's not likely to have turned deadly here. Come on!"

He went forward over the singularly bouncy ground. The others followed. It was to be noted that Hallet the engineer, avoided the huge harmless creature more widely than most.

THEY reached the mound which was the ship. Moran unlimbered his torch. He said sardonically;

"This ship won't do anybody

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any good. It's old-style. That thick belt around its middle was dropped a hundred years ago, and more." There was an abrupt thickening of the cylindrical hull at the middle. There was an equally abrupt thinning, again, toward the landing-fins. The sharpness of the change was blurred over by the revolting ground-stuff growing everywhere. "We're going to find that this wreck has been here a century at least!"

Without orders, he turned on the torch. A four-foot flame of pure blue-white leaped out. He touched its tip to the fungoid soil. Steam leaped up. He used the flame like a gigantic scalpel, cutting a square a yard deep in the whitish stuff, and then cutting it across and across to destroy it. Thick fumes arose, and quiverings and shakings began. Black creatures in their labyrinths of tunnels began to panic. Off to the right the blanket-like surface ripped and they poured out. They scuttled crazily here and there. Some took to wing. By instinct the other men—the armed ones—moved back from the smoke. They wore space-helmets but they felt that there should be an intolerable smell.

Moran slashed and slashed angrily with the big flame, cutting a way to the metal hull that had fallen here before his grandfather was born. Sometimes the flame cut across things that writhed, and he was sickened. But above all he raged because he was to be marooned here. He could not altogether blame the others. They couldn't land at any colonized world with him on board without his being detected as an extra member of the crew. His fate would then be sealed. But they also would be investigated. Official queries would go across this whole sector of the galaxy, naming five persons of such-and-such description and such-and-such fingerprints, voyaging in a space-yacht of such-and-such size and registration. The world they came from would claim them as fugitives. They would be returned to it. They'd be executed.

Then Carol's voice came in his helmet-phone. She cried out;

"Look out! It's coming! Kill it! Kill it—."

He heard blast-rifles firing. He heard Burleigh pant commands. He was on his way out of the hollow he'd carved when he heard Harper cry out horribly.

He got clear of the newly burned-away stuff. There was still much smoke and stream. But he saw Harper. More, he saw the thing that had Harper.

It occurred to him instantly that if Harper died, there would not be too many people on the *Nadine*. They need not maroon him. In fact, they wouldn't dare.

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A ship that came in to port with two few on board would be investigated as thoroughly as one that had too many. Perhaps more thoroughly. So if Harper were killed, Moran would be needed to take his place. He'd go on from here in the *Nadine*, necessarily accepted as a member of her crew.

Then he rushed, the flame-torch making a roaring sound.

II.

THEY went back to the *Nadine* for weapons more adequate for encountering the local fauna when it was over. Blast-rifles were not effective against such creatures as these. Torches were contact weapons but they killed. Blast-rifles did not. And Harper needed to pull himself together again, too. Also, neither Moran nor any of the others wanted to go back to the still un-entered wreck while the skinny, somehow disgusting legs of the thing still kicked spasmodically—quite separate—on the whitish ground-stuff. Moran had disliked such creatures in miniature form on other worlds. Enlarged like this.

It seemed insane that such creatures, even in miniature, should painstakingly be brought across light-years of space to the new worlds men settled on. But it had been found to be necessary. The ecological system in which human beings belonged had turned out to be infinitely complicated. It had turned out, in fact, to be the ecological system of Earth, and unless all parts of the complex were present, the total was subtly or glaringly wrong. So mankind distastefully ferried pests as well as useful creatures to its new worlds as they were made ready for settlement. Mosquitos throve on the inhabited globes of the Rim Stars. Roaches twitched nervous antennae on the settled planets of the Coal-sack. Dogs on Antares had fleas, and scratched their bites, and humanity spread through the galaxy with an attendant train of insects and annoyances. If they left their pests behind, the total system of checks and balances which make life practical would get lopsided. It would not maintain itself. The vagaries that could result were admirably illustrated in and on the landscape outside the *Nadine*. Something had been left out of the seeding of this planet. The element—which might be a bacterium or a virus or almost anything at all—the element that kept creatures at the size called "normal" was either missing or inoperable here. The results were not desirable.

HARPER drank thirstily. Carol had watched from the control-room. She was still pale. She looked strangely at Moran.

"You're sure it didn't get

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through your suit?" Burleigh asked insistently of Harper.

Moran said sourly;

"The creatures have changed size. There's no proof they've changed anything else. Beetles live in tunnels they make in fungus growths. The beetles and the tunnels are larger, but that's all. Inchworms travel as they always did. They move yards instead of inches, but that's all. Centipedes—"

"It was—" said Carol unsteadily. "It was thirty feet long!"

"Centipedes," repeated Moran, "catch prey with their legs. They always did. Some of them trail poison from their feet. We can play a blowtorch over Harper's suit and any poison will be burned away. You can't burn a space-suit!"

"We certainly can't leave Moran here!" said Burleigh uneasily.

"He kept Harper from being killed!" said Carol. "Your blast-rifles weren't any good. The—creatures are hard to kill."

"Very hard to kill," agreed Moran. "But I'm not supposed to kill them. I'm supposed to live with them! I wonder how we can make them understand they're not supposed to kill me either?"

"I'll admit," said Burleigh, "that if you'd let Harper get killed, we'd have been forced to let you take his identity and not be marooned, to avoid questions at the spaceport on Loris. Not many men would have done what you did."

"Oh, I'm a hero," said Moran. "Noble Moran, that's me! What the hell would you want me to do? I didn't think! I won't do it again. I promise!"

The last statement was almost true. Moran felt a squeamish horror at the memory of what he'd been through over by the wrecked ship. He'd come running out of the excavation he'd made. He had for weapon a four-foot blue-white flame, and there was a monstrous creature running directly toward him, with Harper lifted off the ground and clutched in two gigantic, spidery legs. It was no less than thirty feet long, but it was a centipede. It travelled swiftly on grisly, skinny, pipe-thin legs. It loomed over Moran as he reached the surface and he automatically thrust the flame at it. The result was shocking. But the nervous systems of insects are primitive. It is questionable that they feel pain. It is certain that separated parts of them act as if they had independent life. Legs—horrible things—sheared off in the flame of the torch, but the grisly furry thing rushed on until Moran slashed across its body with the blue-white fire. Then it collapsed. But Harper was still held firmly and half the monster struggled mindlessly to run on while an-

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other part was dead. Moran fought it almost hysterically, slicing off legs and wanting to be sick when their stumps continued to move as if purposefully, and the legs themselves kicked and writhed rhythmically. But he bored in and cut at the body and ultimately dragged Harper clear.

Afterward, sickened, he completed cutting it to bits with the torch. But each part continued nauseatingly to move. He went back with the others to the *Nadine*. The blast-rifles had been almost completely without effect upon the creature because of its insensitive nervous system.

"I THINK," said Burleigh, "that it is only fair for us to lift from here and find a better part of this world to land Moran in."

"Why not another planet?" asked Carol.

"It could take weeks," said Burleigh harassedly. "We left Coryus three days ago. We ought to land on Loris before too long. There'd be questions asked if we turned up weeks late! We can't afford that! The space-port police would suspect us of all sorts of things. They might decide to check back on us where we came from. We can't take the time to hunt another planet!"

"Then your best bet," said Moran caustically, "is to find out where we are. You may be so far from Loris that you can't make port without raising questions anyhow. But you might be almost on course. I don't know! But let's see if that wreck can tell us. I'll go by myself if you like."

He went into the airlock, where his suit and the others had been sprayed with a corrosive solution while the outside air was pumped out and new air from inside the yacht admitted. He got into the suit. Harper joined him.

"I'm going with you," he said shortly. "Two will be safer than one,—both with torches."

"Too, too true!" said Moran sardonically.

He bundled the other suits out of the airlock and into the ship. He checked his torch. He closed the inner lock door and started the pump. Harper said;

"I'm not going to try to thank you—."

"Because," Moran snapped, "you wouldn't have been on this planet to be in danger if I hadn't tried to capture the yacht. I know it!"

"That wasn't what I meant to say!" protested Harper.

Moran snarled at him. The lock-pump stopped and the ready-for exit light glowed. They pushed open the outer door and emerged. Again there was the discordant, almost intolerable din. It made no sense. The cries and calls and stridulations they now knew to be those of insects

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had no significance. The unseen huge creatures made them without purpose. Insects do not challenge each other like birds or make mating-calls like animals. They make noises because it is their nature. The noises have no meaning. The two men started toward the wreck to which Moran had partly burned a passage-way. There were clickings from underfoot all around them. Moran said abruptly;

"Those clicks come from the beetles in their tunnels underfoot. They're practically a foot long. How big do you suppose bugs grow here,—and why?"

HARPER did not answer. He carried a flame-torch like the one Moran had used before. They went unsteadily over the elastic, yielding stuff underfoot. Harper halted, to look behind. Carol's voice came in the helmet-phones.

"We're watching out for you. We'll try to warn you if—anything shows up."

"Better watch me!" snapped Moran. "If I should kill Harper after all, you might have to pass me for him presently!"

He heard a small, inarticulate sound, as if Carol protested. Then he heard an angry shrill whine. He'd turned aside from the direct line to the wreck. Something black, the size of a fair-sized dog, faced him belligerently. Multiple lensed eyes, five inches across, seemed to regard him in a peculiarly daunting fashion. The creature had a narrow, unearthly, triangular face, with mandibles that worked from side to side instead of up and down like an animal's jaws. The head was utterly unlike any animal such as breed and raise their young and will fight for them. There was a small thorax, from which six spiny, glistening legs sprang. There was a bulbous abdomen.

"This," said Moran coldly, "is an ant. I've stepped on them for no reason, and killed them. I've probably killed many times as many without knowing it. But this could kill me."

The almost yard-long enormity standing two and a half feet high, was in the act of carrying away a section of one of the legs of the giant centipede Moran had killed earlier. It still moved. The leg was many times the size of the ant. Moran moved toward it. It made a louder buzzing sound, threatening him.

Moran cut it apart with a slashing sweep of the flame that a finger-touch sent leaping from his torch. The thing presumably died, but it continued to writhe senselessly.

"I killed this one," said Moran savagely, "because I remembered something from my childhood. When one ant finds something to eat and can't carry it all away, it

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brings back its friends to get the rest. The big thing I killed would be such an item. How'd you like to have a horde of these things about us? Come on!"

Through his helmet-phone he heard Harper breathing harshly. He led the way once more toward the wreck.

BLACK beetles swarmed about when he entered the cut in the mould-yeast soil. They popped out of tunnels as if in astonishment that what had been subterranean passages suddenly opened to the air. Harper stepped on one, and it did not crush. It struggled frantically and he almost fell. He gasped. Two of the creatures crawled swiftly up the legs of Moran's suit, and he knocked them savagely away. He found himself grinding his teeth in invincible revulsion.

They reached the end of the cut he'd made in the fungus-stuff. Metal showed past burned-away soil. Moran growled;

"You keep watch. I'll finish the cut."

The flame leaped out. Dense clouds of smoke and steam poured out and up. With the intolerably bright light of the torch overwhelming the perpetual grayness under the clouds and playing upon curling vapors, the two space-suited men looked like figures in some sort of inferno.

Carol's voice came anxiously into Moran's helmet-phone;

"Are you all right?"

"So far, both of us," said Moran sourly. "I've just uncovered the crack of an airlock door."

He swept the flame around again. A mass of undercut fungus toppled toward him. He burned it and went on. He swept the flame more widely. There was carbonized matter from the previously burned stuff on the metal, but he cleared all the metal. Carol's voice again;

"There's something flying . . . It's huge! It's a wasp! It's —monstrous!"

Moran growled;

"Harper, we're in a sort of trench. If it hovers, you'll burn it as it comes down. Cut through its waist. It won't crawl toward us along the trench. It'd have to back toward us to use its sting."

He burned and burned, white light glaring upon a mass of steam and smoke which curled upward and looked as if lightning-flashes played within it.

Carol's voice;

"It—went on past. . . . It was as big as a cow!"

MORAN wrenched at the port-door. It partly revolved. He pulled. It fell outward. The wreck was not standing upright on its fins. It lay on its side. The lock inside the toppled-out port was choked with a horrible mass of

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thread-like fungi. Moran swept the flame in. The fungus shriveled and was not. He opened the inner lock-door. There was pure blackness within. He held the torch for light.

For an instant everything was confusion, because the wreck was lying on its side instead of standing in a normal position. Then he saw a sheet of metal, propped up to be seen instantly by anyone entering the wrecked space-vessel.

Letters burned into the metal gave a date a century and a half old. Straggly torch-writing said baldly;

"This ship the Malabar crashed here on Tethys, II a week ago. We cannot repair. We are going on to Candida III in the boats. We are carrying what bessendium we can with us. We resign salvage rights in this ship to its finders, but we have more bessendium with us. We will give that to our rescuers.

Jos. White, Captain."

Moran made a peculiar, sardonic sound like a bark.

"Calling the *Nadine!*" he said in mirthless amusement. "This planet is Tethys Two. Do you read me? Tethys II! Look it up!"

A pause. Then Carol's voice, relieved;

"Tethys is in the Directory! That's good!" There was the sound of murmurings in the control-room behind her. *"Yes!. . . . Oh,—wonderful! It's not far off the course we should have followed! We won't be suspiciously late at Loris! Wonderful!"*

"I share your joy," said Moran sarcastically. "More information! The ship's name was the *Malabar*. She carried bessendium among her cargo. Her crew went on to Candida III a hundred and fifty years ago, leaving a promise to pay in more bessendium whoever should rescue them. More bessendium! Which suggests that some bessendium was left behind."

Silence. The bald memorandum left behind the vanished crew was, of course, pure tragedy. A ship's lifeboat could travel four light-years, or possibly even six. But there were limits. A castaway crew had left this world on a desperate journey to another in the hope that life there would be tolerable. If they arrived, they waited for some other ship to cross the illimitable emptiness and discover either the beacon here or one they'd set up on the other world. The likelihood was small, at best. It had worked out zero. If the lifeboats made Candida III, their crews stayed there because they could go no farther. They'd died there, because if they'd been found this ship would have been visited and its cargo salvaged.

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MORAN went inside. He climbed through the compartments of the toppled craft, using his torch for light. He found where the cargo-hold had been opened from the living part of the ship. He saw the cargo. There were small, obviously heavy boxes in one part of the hold. Some had been broken open. He found scraps of purple bessendium ore dropped while being carried to the lifeboats. A century and a half ago it had not seemed worth while to pick them up, though bessendium was the most precious material in the galaxy. It couldn't be synthesized. It had to be made by some natural process not yet understood, but involving long-continued pressures of megatons to the square inch with temperatures in the millions of degrees. It was purple. It was crystalline. Fractions of it in blocks of other metals made the fuel-blocks that carried liners winging through the void. But here were pounds of it dropped carelessly. . . .

Moran gathered a double handful. He slipped it in a pocket of his space-suit. He went clambering back to the lock.

He heard the roaring of a flame-torch. He found Harper playing it squeamishly on the wriggling fragments of another yard-long ant. It had explored the trench burned out of the fungus soil and down to the rock. Harper'd killed it as it neared him.

"That's three of them I've killed," said Harper in a dogged voice. "There seem to be more."

"Did you hear my news?" asked Moran sardonically.

"Yes," said Harper. "How'll we get back to the *Nadine?*"

"Oh, we'll fight our way through," said Moran, as sardonically as before. "We'll practice splendid heroism, giving battle to ants who think we're other ants trying to rob them of some fragments of an over-sized dead centipede. A splendid cause to fight for, Harper!"

He felt an almost overpowering sense of irony. The quantity of bessendium he'd seen was riches incalculable. The mere pocketfull of crystals in his pocket would make any man wealthy if he could get to a settled planet and sell them. And there was much, much more back in the cargo-hold of the wreck. He'd seen it.

But his own situation was unchanged. Bessendium could be hidden somehow,—perhaps between the inner and outer hulls of the *Nadine.* But it was not possible to land the *Nadine* at any space-port with an extra man aboard her. In a sense, Moran might be one of the richest men in the galaxy in his salvagers' right to the treasure in the wrecked *Malabar's* hold. But he

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could not use that treasure to buy his way to a landing on a colonized world.

Carol's voice; she was frightened.

"Something's coming! It's—terribly big! It's coming out of the mist!"

MORAN pushed past Harper in the trench that ended at the wreck's lock-door. He moved on until he could see over the edge of that trench as it shallowed. Now there were not less than forty of the giant ants about the remnants of the monstrous centipede Moran had killed. They moved about in great agitation. There was squabbling. Angry, whining stridulations filled the air beneath the louder and more gruesome sounds from far-theraway places. It appeared that scouts and foragers from two different ant-cities had come upon the treasure of dead—if twitching—meat of Moran's providing. They differed about where the noisesome booty should be taken. Some ants pulled angrily against each other, whining shrilly. He saw individual ants running frantically away in two different directions. They would be couriers, carrying news of what amounted to a frontier incident in the city-state civilization of the ants.

Then Moran saw the giant thing of which Carol spoke. It was truly huge, and it had a gross, rounded body, and a ridiculously small thorax, and its head was tiny and utterly mild in expression. It walked with an enormous, dainty deliberation, placing small spiked feet at the end of fifteen-foot legs very delicately in place as it moved. Its eyes were multiple and huge, and its forelegs though used so deftly for walking had a horrifying set of murderous, needle-sharp saw-teeth along their edges.

It looked at the squabbling ants with its gigantic eyes that somehow appeared like dark glasses worn by a monstrosity. It moved primly, precisely toward them. Two small black creatures tugged at a hairy section of a giant centipede's leg. The great pale-green creature—a mantis; a praying mantis twenty feet tall in its giraffe-like walking position—the great creature loomed over them, looking down as through sunglasses. A foreleg moved like lightning. An ant weighing nearly as much as a man stridulated shrilly, terribly, as it was borne aloft. The mantis closed its arm-like forelegs upon it, holding it as if piously and benignly contemplating it. Then it ate it, very much as a man might eat an apple, without regard to the convulsive writhings of its victim.

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IT moved on toward the denser fracas among the ants. Suddenly it raised its ghastly saw-toothed forelegs in an extraordinary gesture. It was the mantis' spectral attitude, which seemed a pose of holding out its arms in benediction. But its eyes remained blind-seeming and enigmatic,—again like dark glasses.

Then it struck. Daintily, it dined upon an ant. Upon another. Upon another and another and another.

From one direction parties of agitated and hurrying black objects appeared at the edge of the mist. They were ants of a special caste,—warrior-ants with huge mandibles designed for fighting in defense of their city and its social system and its claim to fragments of dead centipedes. From another direction other parties of no less truculent warriors moved with the swiftness and celerity of a striking task-force. All the air was filled with the deep-bass notes of something huge, booming beyond visibility, and the noises as of sticks trailed against picket fences, and hootings which were produced by the rubbing of serrated leg-joints against chitinous diaphragms. But now a new tumult arose.

From forty disputatious *formicidae,* whining angrily at each other over the stinking remains of the monster Moran had killed, the number of ants involved in the quarrel became hundreds. But more and more arrived. The special caste of warriors bred for warfare was not numerous enough to take care of the provocative behavior of foreign foragers. There was a general mobilization in both unseen ant-city states. They became nations in arms. Their populations rushed to the scene of conflict. The burrows and dormitories and eating-chambers of the underground nations were swept clean of occupants. Only the nurseries retained a skeleton staff of nurses —the nurseries and the excavated palace occupied by the ant-queen and her staff of servants and administrators. All the resources of two populous ant-nations were flung into the fray.

FROM a space of a hundred yards or less, containing mere dozens of belligerent squabblers, the dirty-white ground of the fungus-plain became occupied by hundreds of snapping, biting combatants. They covered—they fought over—the half of an acre. There were contending battalions fighting as masses in the center, while wings of fighting creatures to right and left were less solidly arranged. But reinforcements poured out of the mist from two directions, and momently the situation changed. Presently the battle covered an acre. Groups of fresh fighters arriving from the

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city to the right uttered shrill stridulations and charged upon the flank of their enemies. Simultaneously, reinforcements from the city to the left flung themselves into the fighting-line near the center.

Formations broke up. The battle disintegrated into an indefinite number of lesser combats; troops or regiments fighting together often moved ahead with an appearance of invincibility, but suddenly they broke and broke again until there was only a complete confusion of unorganized single combats in which the fighters rolled over and over, struggling ferociously with mandible and claw to destroy each other. Presently the battle raged over five acres. Ten. Thousands upon thousands of black, glistening, stinking creatures tore at each other in murderous ferocity. Whining, squealing battle-cries arose and almost drowned out the deeper notes of larger but invisible creatures off in the mist.

Moran and Harper got back to the *Nadine* by a wide detour past warriors preoccupied with each other just before the battle reached its most savage stage. In that stage, the space-yacht was included in the battleground. Fights went on about its landing-fins. Horrifying duels could be followed by scrapings and bumpings against its hull. From the yacht's ports the fighting ants looked like infuriated machines, engaged in each other's destruction. One might see a warrior of unidentified allegiance with its own abdomen ripped open, furiously rending an enemy without regard to its own mortal wound. There were those who had literally been torn in half, so that only head and thorax remained, but they fought on no less valiantly than the rest.

AT the edges of the fighting such cripples were more numerous. Ants with antenna shorn off or broken, with legs missing, utterly doomed,—they sometimes wandered forlornly beyond the fighting, the battle seemingly forgotten. But even such dazed and incapacitated casualties came upon each other. If they smelled alike, they ignored each other. Every ant-city has its particular smell which its inhabitants share. Possession of the national odor is at once a certificate of citizenship in peacetime and a uniform in war. When such victims of the battle came upon enemy walking wounded, they fought.

And the giant praying mantis remained placidly and invulnerably still. It plucked single fighters from the battle and dined upon them while they struggled, and plucked other fighters, and consumed them. It ignored the

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battle and the high purpose and self-sacrificing patriotism of the ants. Immune to them and disregarded by them, it fed on them while the battle raged.

Presently the gray light overhead turned faintly pink, and became a deeper tint and then crimson. In time there was darkness. The noise of battle ended. The sounds of the day diminished and ceased, and other monstrous outcries took their place.

There were bellowings in the blackness without the *Nadine*. There were chirpings become baritone, and senseless uproars which might be unbelievable modifications of once-shrill and once-tranquil night-sounds of other worlds. And there came a peculiar, steady, unrhythmic pattering sound. It seemed like something falling upon the blanket-like upper surface of the soil.

Moran opened the airlock door and thrust out a torch to see. Its intolerably bright glare showed the battlefield abandoned. Most of the dead and wounded had been carried away. Which, of course, was not solicitude for the wounded or reverence for the dead heroes. Dead ants, like dead centipedes, were booty of the only kind the creatures of this world could know. The dead were meat. The wounded were dead before they were carried away.

Moran peered out, with Carol looking affrightedly over his shoulder. The air seemed to shine slightly in the glare of the torch. The pattering sound was abruptly explained. Large, slow, widely-separated raindrops fell heavily and steadily from the cloud-banks overhead. Moran could see them strike. Each spot of wetness glistened briefly. Then the rain-drop was absorbed by the ground.

But there were other noises than the ceaseless tumult on the ground. There were sounds in the air; the beating of enormous wings. Moran looked up, squinting against the light. There were things moving about the black sky. Gigantic things.

Something moved, too, across the diminishingly lighted surface about the yacht. There were glitterings. Shining armor. Multi-faceted eyes. A gigantic, horny, spiked object crawled toward the torch-glare, fascinated by it. Something else dived insanely. It splashed upon the flexible white surface twenty yards away, and struggled upward and took crazily off again. It careened blindly.

IT hit the yacht, a quarter-ton of night-flying beetle. The air seemed filled with flying things. There were moths with twenty-foot wings and eyes which glowed like rubies in the torch's light. There were beetles of all sizes from tiny six-inch things to monsters in whom Moran did not be-

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lieve even when he saw them. All were drawn by the light which should not exist under the cloud-bank. They droned and fluttered and performed lunatic evolutions, coming always closer to the flame.

Moran cut off the torch and closed the lock-door from the inside.

"We don't load bessendium tonight," he said with some grimness. "To have no light, with what crawls about in the darkness, would be suicide. But to use lights would be worse. If you people are going to salvage the stuff in that wreck, you'll have to wait for daylight. At least then you can see what's coming after you."

They went into the yacht proper. There was no longer any question about the planet's air. If insects which were descendents of terrestrial forms could breathe it, so could men. When the first insect-eggs were brought here, the air had to be fit for them if they were to survive. It would not have changed.

Burleigh sat in the control-room with a double handful of purple crystals before him.

"This," he said when Moran and Carol reëntered, "this is bessendium past question. I've been thinking what it means."

"Money," said Moran drily. "You'll all be rich. You'll probably retire from politics."

"That wasn't exactly what I had in mind," said Burleigh distastefully. "You've gotten us into the devil of a mess, Moran!"

"For which," said Moran with ironic politeness, "there is a perfect solution. You kill me, either directly or by leaving me marooned here."

Burleigh scowled.

"We have to land at spaceports for supplies. We can't hope to hide you, it's required that landed ships be sterilized against infections from off-planet. We can't pass you as a normal passenger. You're not on the ship's papers and they're alteration-proof. Nobody's ever been able to change a ship's papers and not be caught! We could land and tell the truth, that you hijacked the ship and we finally overpowered you. But there are reasons against that."

"Naturally!" agreed Moran. "I'd be killed anyhow and you'd be subject to intensive investigation. And you're fugitives as much as I am."

"Just so," admitted Burleigh.

Moran shrugged.

"Which leaves just one answer. You maroon me and go on your way."

BURLEIGH said painfully; "There's this bessendium. If there's more—especially if there's more—we can leave you here with part of it. When we get far enough away, we charter a

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ship to come and get you. It'll be arranged. Somebody will be listed as of that ship's company, but he'll slip away from the spaceport and not be on board at all. Then you're picked up and landed using his name."

"If," said Moran ironically, "I am alive when the ship gets here. If I'm not, the crew of the chartered ship will be in trouble, short one man on return to port. You'll have trouble getting anybody to run that risk!"

"We're trying to work out a way to save you!" insisted Burleigh angrily. "Harper would have been killed but for you. And —this bessendium will finance the underground work that will presently make a success of our revolution. We're grateful! We're trying to help you!"

"So you maroon me," said Moran. Then he said; "But you've skipped the real problem! If anything goes wrong, Carol's in it! There's no way to do anything without risk for her! That's the problem! I could kill all you characters, land somewhere on a colonized planet exactly as you landed here, and be gone from the yacht on foot before anybody could find me! But I have a slight aversion to getting a girl killed or killing her just for my own convenience. It's settled. I stay here. You can try to arrange the other business if you like. But it's a bad gamble."

Carol was very pale. Burleigh stood up.

"You said that, I didn't. But I don't think we should leave you here. Up near the ice-cap should be infinitely better for you. We'll load the rest of the bessendium tomorrow, find you a place, leave you a beacon, and go."

He went out. Carol turned a white face to Moran.

"Is that—is that the real trouble? Do you really—"

Moran looked at her stonily.

"I like to make heroic gestures," he told her. "Actually, Burleigh's a very noble sort of character himself. He proposes to leave me with treasure that he could take. Even more remarkably, he proposes to divide up what you take, instead of applying it all to further his political ideals. Most men like him would take it all for the revolution!"

"But—but—."

Carol's expression was pure misery. Moran walked deliberately across the control-room. He glanced out of a port. A face looked in. It filled the transparent opening. It was unthinkable. It was furry. There were glistening chitinous areas. There was a proboscis like an elephant's trunk, curled horribly. The eyes were multiple and mad.

It looked in, drawn and hypnotized by the light shining out on this nightmare world from the control-room ports.

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Moran touched the button that closed the shutters.

III.

WHEN morning came, its arrival was the exact reversal of the coming of night. In the beginning there was darkness, and in the darkness there was horror.

The creatures of the night untiringly filled the air with sound, and the sounds were discordant and gruesome and revolting. The creatures of this planet were gigantic. They should have adopted new customs appropriate to the dignity of their increased size. But they hadn't. The manners and customs of insects are immutable. They feed upon specific prey—spiders are an exception, but they are not insects at all—and they lay their eggs in specific fashion in specific places, and they behave according to instincts which are so detailed as to leave them no choice at all in their actions. They move blindly about, reacting like automata of infinite complexity which are capable of nothing not built into them from the beginning. Centuries and millenia do not change them. Travel across star-clusters leaves them with exactly the capacities for reaction that their remotest ancestors had, before men lifted off ancient Earth's green surface.

The first sign of dawn was deep, deep, deepest red in the cloud-bank no more than fifteen hundred feet overhead. The red became brighter, and presently was as brilliant as dried blood. Again presently it was crimson over all the half-mile circle that human eyes could penetrate. Later still—but briefly—it was pink. Then the sky became gray. From that color it did not change again.

Moran joined Burleigh in a survey of the landscape from the control-room. The battlefield was empty now. Of the thousands upon thousands of stinking combatants who'd rent and torn each other the evening before, there remained hardly a trace. Here and there, to be sure, a severed saw-toothed leg remained. There were perhaps as many as four relatively intact corpses not yet salvaged. But something was being done about them.

There were tiny, brightly-banded beetles hardly a foot long which labored industriously over such frayed objects. They worked agitatedly in the yeasty stuff which on this world took the place of soil. They excavated, beneath the bodies of the dead ants, hollows into which those carcasses could descend. They pushed the yeasty, curdy stuff up and around the sides of those to-be-desired objects. The dead warriors sank little by little toward oblivion as the process went on. The up-thrust, dug-out material

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collapsed upon them as they descended. In a very little while they would be buried where no larger carrion-eater would discover them, and then the brightly-colored sexton beetles would begin a banquet to last until only fragments of chitinous armor remained.

BUT Moran and Burleigh, in the *Nadine's* control-room, could hardly note such details.

"You saw the cargo," said Burleigh, frowning. "How's it packed? The bessendium, I mean."

"It's in small boxes too heavy to be handled easily," said Moran. "Anyhow the *Malabar's* crew broke some of them open to load the stuff on their lifeboats."

"The lifeboats are all gone?"

"Naturally," said Moran. "At a guess they'd have used all of them even if they didn't need them for the crew. They could carry extra food and weapons and such."

"How much bessendium is left?"

"Probably twenty boxes unopened," said Moran. "I can't guess at the weight, but it's a lot. They opened six boxes." He paused. "I have a suggestion."

"What?"

"When you've supplied yourselves," said Moran, "leave some space-port somewhere with papers saying you're going to hunt for minerals on some plausible planet. You can get such a clearance. Then you can return with bessendium coming out of the *Nadine's* waste-pipes and people will be surprised but not suspicious. You'll file for mineral rights, and cash your cargo. Everybody will get busy trying to grab off the mineral rights for themselves. You can clear out and let them try to find the bessendium lode. You'll be allowed to go, all right, and you can settle down somewhere rich and highly respected."

"Hmmm," said Burleigh. Then he said uncomfortably; "One wonders about the original owners of the stuff."

"After a hundred and fifty years," said Moran, "who'd you divide with? The insurance company that paid for the lost ship? The heirs of the crew? How'd you find them?" Then he added amusedly, "Only revolutionists and enemies of governments would be honest enough to worry about that!"

Brawn came into the control-room. He said broodingly that breakfast was ready. Moran had never heard him speak in a normally cheerful voice. When he went out, Moran said;

"I don't suppose he'll be so gloomy when he's rich!"

"His family was wiped out," said Burleigh curtly, "by the government we were fighting.

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The girl he was going to marry, too."

"Then I take back what I said," said Moran ruefully.

THEY went down to breakfast. Carol served it. She did not look well. Her eyes seemed to show that she'd been crying. But she treated Moran exactly like anyone else. Harper was very quiet, too. He took very seriously the fact that Moran had saved his life at the risk of his on the day before. Brawn breakfasted in a subdued, moody fashion. Only Hallet seemed to have reacted to the discovery of a salvageable shipment of bessendium that should make everybody rich, —everybody but Moran, who was ultimately responsible for the find.

"Burleigh," said Hallet expansively, "says the stuff you brought back from the wreck is worth fifty thousand credits, at least. What's the whole shipment worth?"

"I've no idea," said Moran. "It would certainly pay for a fleet of space-liners, and I'd give all of it for a ticket on one of them."

"But how much is there in bulk?" insisted Hallet.

"I saw that half a dozen boxes had been broken open and emptied for the lifeboat voyagers," Moran told him. "I didn't count the balance, but there were several times as many untouched. If they're all full of the same stuff, you can guess almost any sum you please."

"Millions, eh?" said Hallet. His eyes glistened. "Billions? Plenty for everybody?"

"There's never plenty for more than one," said Moran mildly. "That's the way we seem to be made."

Burleigh said suddenly;

"I'm worried about getting the stuff aboard. We can't afford to lose anybody, and if we have to fight the creatures here and every time we kill one its carcass draws others."

Moran took a piece of bread. He said;

"I've been thinking about survival-tactics for myself as a castaway. I think a torch is the answer. In any emergency on the yeast surface, I can burn a hole and drop down in it. The monsters are stupid. In most cases they'll go away because they stop seeing me. In the others, they'll come to the hole and I'll burn them. It won't be pleasant, but it may be practical."

Burleigh considered it.

"It may be," he admitted. "It may be."

Hallet said;

"I want to see that work before I trust the idea."

"Somebody has to try it," agreed Moran. "Anyhow my life's going to depend on it."

Carol left the room. Moran

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looked after her as the door closed.

"She doesn't like the idea of our leaving you behind," said Burleigh. "None of us do."

"I'm touched."

"We'll try to get a ship to come for you, quickly," said Burleigh.

"I'm sure you will," said Moran politely.

BUT he was not confident. The laws governing space-travel were very strict indeed, and enforced with all the rigor possible. On their enforcement, indeed, depended the law and order of the planets. Criminals had to know that they could not escape to space whenever matters got too hot for them aground. For a spaceman to trifle with interstellar-traffic laws meant at the least that they were grounded for life. But the probabilities were much worse than that. It was most likely that Burleigh or any of the others would be reported to space-port police instantly they attempted to charter a ship for any kind of illegal activity. Moran made a mental note to warn Burleigh about it.

By now, though, he was aware of a very deep irritation at the idea of being killed, whether by monsters on this planet or men sent to pick him up for due process of law. When he made the grand gesture of seizing the *Nadine*, he'd known nothing about the people on board, and he hadn't really expected to succeed. His real hope was to be killed without preliminary scientific questioning. Modern techniques of interrogation were not torture, but they stripped away all concealments of motive and to a great degree revealed anybody who'd helped one. Moran had killed a man in a fair fight the other man did not want to engage in. If he were caught on Coryus or returned to it, his motivation could be read from his mind. And if that was done the killing—and the sacrifice of his own future and life—would have been useless. But he'd been prepared to be killed. Even now he'd prefer to die here on Tethys than in the strictly painless manner of executions on Coryus. But he was now deeply resistant to the idea of dying at all. There was Carol . . .

He thrust such thoughts aside.

MORNING was well begun when they prepared to transfer the wreck's treasure to the *Nadine*. Moran went first. At fifteen-foot intervals he burned holes in the curd-like, elastic ground-cover. Some of the holes went down only four feet to the stone beneath it. Some went down six. But a man who jumped down one of them would be safe against attack except from directly overhead, which was an un-

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likely direction for attack by an insect. Carol had seen a wasp fly past the day before. She said it was as big as a cow. A sting from such a monster would instantly be fatal. But no wasp would have the intelligence to use its sting on something it had not seized. A man should be safe in such a fox-hole. If a creature did try to investigate the opening, a torch could come into play. It was the most practical possible way for a man to defend himself on this world.

Moran made more than a dozen such holes of refuge in the line between the *Nadine* and the wreck. Carol watched with passionate solicitude from a control-room port as he progressed. He entered the wreck through the lock-doors he'd uncovered. Harper followed doggedly, not less than two fox-holes behind. Carol's voice reassured them, the while, that within the half-mile circle of visibility no monster walked or flew.

Inside the wreck, Moran placed emergency-lanterns to light the dark interior. He placed them along the particularly inconvenient passageways of a ship lying on its side instead of standing upright. He was at work breaking open a box of bessendium when Harper joined him. Harper said heavily;

"I've brought a bag. It was a pillow. Carol took the foam out."

"We'll fill it," said Moran. "Not too full. The stuff's heavy."

Harper watched while Moran poured purple crystals into it from his cupped hands.

"There you are," said Moran. "Take it away."

"Look!" said Harper. "I owe you plenty—."

"Then pay me," said Moran, exasperatedly, "by shutting up! By making Burleigh damned careful about who he tries to hire to come after me! And by getting this cargo-shifting business in operation! The *Nadine's* almost due on Loris. You don't want to have the space-port police get suspicions. Get moving!"

HARPER clambered over the side of doorways. He disappeared. Moran was alone in the ship. He explored. He found that the crew that had abandoned the *Malabar* had been guilty of a singular oversight for a crew abandoning ship. But, of course, they'd been distracted not only by their predicament but by the decision to carry part of the ship's precious cargo with them, so they could make it a profitable enterprise to rescue them. They hadn't taken the trouble to follow all the rules laid down for a crew taking to the boats.

Moran made good their omission. He was back in the cargo-hold when Brawn arrived. Burleigh came next. Then Harper

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again. Hallet came last of the four men of the yacht. They did not make a continuous chain of men moving back and forth between the two ships. Three men came, and loaded up, and went back. Then three men came again, one by one. There could never be a moment when a single refuge-hole in the soil could be needed by two men at the same time.

Within the first hour of work at transferring treasure, the bolt-holes came into use. Carol called anxiously that a gigantic beetle neared the ship and would apparently pass between it and the yacht. At the time, Brawn and Harper were moving from the *Malabar* toward the *Nadine*, and Hallet was about to leave the wreck's lock.

He watched with wide eyes. The beetle was truly a monster, the size of a hippopotamus as pictured in the culture-books about early human history. Its jaws, pronged like antlers, projected two yards before its huge, faceted eyes. It seemed to drag itself effortfully over the elastic surface of the ground. It passed a place where red, foleated fungus grew in a fantastic absence of pattern on the surface of the ground. It went through a streak of dusty-blue mould, which it stirred into a cloud of spores as it passed. It crawled on and on. Harper popped down into the nearest bolt-hole, his torch held ready. Brawn stood beside another refuge, sixty feet away.

Carol's voice came to their helmet-phones, anxious and exact. Hallet, in the lock-door, heard her tell Harper that the beetle would pass very close to him and to stay still. It moved on and on. It would be very close indeed. Carol gasped in horror.

The monster passed partly over the hole in which Harper crouched. One of its clawed feet slipped down into the opening. But the beetle went on, unaware of Harper. It crawled toward the encircling mist upon some errand of its own. It was mindless. It was like a complex and highly decorated piece of machinery which did what it was wound up to do, and nothing else.

Harper came out of the bolt-hole when Carol, her voice shaky with relief, told him it was safe. He went doggedly on to the *Nadine*, carrying his bag of purple crystals. Brawn followed, moodily.

HALLET, with a singularly exultant look upon his face, ventured out of the airlock and moved across the fungoid world. He carried a king's ransom to be added to the riches already transferred to the yacht.

Moving the bessendium was a tedious task. One plastic box in the cargo-hold held a quantity of

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crystals that three men took two trips each to carry. In mid-morning the bag in Hallet's hand seemed to slip just when Moran completed filling it. It toppled and spilled half its contents on the cargo-hold floor, which had been a sidewall. He began painstakingly to gather up the precious stuff and get it back in the bag. The others went on to the *Nadine*. Hallet turned off his helmet-phone and gestured to Moran to remove his helmet. Moran, his eyebrows raised, obeyed the suggestion.

"How anxious," asked Hallet abruptly, gathering up the dropped crystals, "how anxious are you to be left behind here?"

"I'm not anxious at all," said Moran.

"Would you like to make a deal to go along when the *Nadine* lifts? —*If* there's a way to get past the space-port police?"

"Probably," said Moran. "Certainly! But there's no way to do it."

"There is," said Hallet. "I know it. Is it a deal?"

"What is the deal?"

"You do as I say," said Hallet significantly. "Just as I say! Then . . ."

The lock-door opened, some distance away. Hallet stood up and said in a commanding tone;

"Keep your mouth shut. I'll tell you what to do and when."

He put on his helmet and turned on the phone once more. He went toward the lock-door. Moran heard him exchange words with Harper and Brawn, back with empty bags to fill with crystals worth many times the price of diamonds. But diamonds were made in half-ton lots, nowadays.

Moran followed their bags. He was frowning. As Harper was about to follow Brawn, Moran almost duplicated Hallet's gestures to have him remove his helmet.

"I want Burleigh to come next trip," he told Harper, "and make some excuse to stay behind a moment and talk to me without the helmet-phones picking up everything I say to him. Understand?"

Harper nodded. But Burleigh did not come on the next trip. It was not until near midday that he came to carry a load of treasure to the yacht.

When he did come, though, he took off his helmet and turned off the phone without the need of a suggestion.

"I've been arranging storage for this stuff," he said. "I've opened plates between the hulls to dump it in. I've told Carol, too, that we've got to do a perfect job of cleaning up. There must be no stray crystals on the floor."

"Better search the bunks, too," said Moran drily, "so nobody will put aside a particularly pretty crystal to gloat over. Listen!"

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He told Burleigh exactly what Hallet had said and what he'd answered. Burleigh looked acutely unhappy.

"Hallet isn't dedicated like the rest of us were," he said distressedly. "We brought him along partly out of fear that if he were captured he'd break down and reveal what he knows of the Underground we led, and much of which we had to leave behind. But I'll be able to finance a real revolt, now!"

MORAN regarded him with irony. Burleigh was a capable man and a conscientious one. It would be very easy to trust him, and it is all-important to an Underground that its leaders be trusted. But it is also important that they be capable of flint-like hardness on occasion. To Moran, it seemed that Burleigh had not quite the adamantine resolution required for leadership in a conspiracy which was to become a successful revolt. He was—and to Moran it seemed regrettable—capable of the virtue of charity.

"I've told you," he said evenly. "Maybe you'll think it's a scheme on my part to get Hallet dumped and myself elected to take his identity. But what happens from now on is your business. Beginning this moment, I'm taking care of my own skin. I've gotten reconciled to the idea of dying, but I'd hate for it not to do anybody any good."

"Carol," said Burleigh unhappily, "is much distressed."

"That's very kind," said Moran sarcastically. "Now take your bag of stuff and get going."

Burleigh obeyed. Moran went back to the business of breaking open the strong plastic boxes of bessendium so their contents could be carried in forty-pound lots to the *Nadine*.

Thinking of Carol, he did not like the way things seemed to be going. Since the discovery of the bessendium, Hallet had been developing ideas. They did not look as if they meant good fortune for Moran without corresponding bad fortune for the others. Obviously, Moran couldn't be hidden on the *Nadine* during the space-port sterilization of the ship which prevented plagues from being carried from world to world. Hallet could have no reason to promise such a thing. Before landing here, he'd urged that Moran simply be dumped out the air-lock. This proposal to save his life. . . .

Moran considered the situation grimly while the business of ferrying treasure to the yacht went on almost monotonously. It had stopped once during the forenoon while a giant beetle went by. Later, it stopped again because a gigantic flying thing hovered overhead. Carol did not know

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what it was, but its bulging abdomen ended in an organ which appeared to be a sting. It was plainly hunting. There was no point in fighting it. Presently it went away, and just before it disappeared in the circular wall of mist-it dived headlong to the ground. A little later it rose slowly into the air, carrying something almost as large as itself. It went away into the mist.

Again, once a green-and-yellow caterpillar marched past upon some mysterious enterprise. It was covered with incredibly long fur, and it moved with an undulating motion of all its segments, one after another. It seemed well over ten yards in length, and its body appeared impossibly massive. But a large part of the bulk would be the two-foot-long or longer hairs which stuck out stiffly in all directions. It, too, went away.

But continually and constantly there was a bedlam of noises. From underneath the yielding skin of the yeast-ground, there came clickings. Sometimes there were quiverings of the surface as if it were alive, but they would be the activities of ten and twelve-inch beetles who lived in subterranean tunnels in it. There were those preposterous noises like someone rattling a stick along a picket fence—only deafening—and there were baritone chirpings and deep bass boomings from somewhere far away. Moran guessed that the last might be frogs, but if so they were vastly larger than men.

SHORTLY after what was probably midday, Moran brushed off his hands. The bessendium part of the cargo of the wrecked *Malabar* had been salvaged. It was hidden between the twin hulls of the yacht. Moran had, quite privately, attended to a matter the wreck's long-dead crew should have done when they left it. Now, in theory, the *Nadine* should lift off and take Moran to some hastily scouted spot not too far from the ice-cap. It should leave him there with what food could be spared, and the kit of seeds that might feed him after it was gone, and weapons that might but probably wouldn't enable him to defend himself, and with a radio-beacon to try to have hope in. Then,—that would be that.

"Calling," said Moran sardonically into his helmet-phone. "Everything's cleaned up here. What next?"

"You can come along," said Hallet's voice from the ship. It was shivery. It was gleeful. *"Just in time for lunch!"*

Moran went along the disoriented passages of the *Malabar* to the lock. He turned off the beacon that had tried uselessly during six human generations to call for

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help for men now long dead. He went out the lock and closed it behind him. It was not likely that this planet would ever become a home for men. If there were some strangeness in its constitution that made the descendents of insects placed upon it grow to be giants, humans would not want to settle on it. And there were plenty of much more suitable worlds. So the wrecked space-ship would lie here, under deeper and ever deeper accumulations of the noisesome stuff that passed for soil. Perhaps millenia from now, the sturdy, resistant metal of the hull would finally rust through, and then—nothing. No man in all time to come would ever see the *Malabar* again.

Shrugging, he went toward the *Nadine*. He walked through bedlam. He could see a quarter-mile in one direction, and a quarter-mile in another. He could not see more than a little distance upward. The *Nadine* had landed upon a world with tens of millions of square miles of surface, and nobody had moved more than a hundred yards from its landing-place, and now it would leave and all wonders and all horrors outside this one quarter of a square mile would remain unknown. . . .

He went to the airlock and shed his suit. He opened the inner door. Hallet waited for him.

"Everybody's at lunch," he said. "We'll join them."

Moran eyed him sharply. Hallet grinned widely.

"We're going to take off to find a place for you as soon as we've eaten," he said.

There was mockery in the tone. It occurred abruptly to Moran that Hallet was the kind of person who might, to be sure, plan complete disloyalty to his companions for his own benefit. But he might also enjoy betrayal for its own sake. He might, for example, find it amusing to make a man under sentence of death or marooning believe that he would escape, so Hallet could have the purely malicious pleasure of disappointing him. He might look for Moran to break when he learned that he was to die here after all.

Moran clamped his lips tightly. Carol would be better off if that was the answer. He went toward the yacht's mess-room. Hallet followed close behind. Moran pushed the door aside and entered. Burleigh and Harper and Brawn looked at him, Carol raised her eyes. They glistened with tears.

Hallet said gleefully;

"Here goes!"

Standing behind Moran, he thrust a hand-blaster past Moran's body and pulled the trigger. He held the trigger down for continuous fire as he tra-

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versed the weapon to wipe out everybody but Moran and himself.

IV.

MORAN responded instantly. His hands flew to Hallet's throat, blind fury making him unaware of any thought but a frantic lust to kill. It was very strange that Moran somehow noticed Hallet's hand insanely pulling the trigger of the blast-pistol over and over and over without result. He remembered it later. Perhaps he shared Hallet's blank disbelief that one could pull the trigger of a blaster and have nothing at all happen in consequence. But nothing did happen, and suddenly he dropped the weapon and clawed desperately at Moran's fingers about his throat. But that was too late.

There was singularly little disturbance at the luncheon-table. The whole event was climax and anticlimax together. Hallet's intention was so appallingly murderous and his action so shockingly futile that the four who were to have been his victims tended to stare blankly while Moran throttled him.

Burleigh seemed to recover first. He tried to pull Moran's hands loose from Hallet's throat. Lacking success he called to the others. "Harper! Brawn! Help me!"

It took all three of them to release Hallet. Then Moran stood panting, shaking, his eyes like flames.

"He—he—" panted Moran. "He was going to kill Carol!"

"I know," said Burleigh, distressedly. "He was going to kill all of us. You gave me an inkling, so while he was packing bessendium between the hulls, and had his space-suit hanging in the airlock, I doctored the blaster in the space-suit pocket." He looked down at Hallet. "Is he still alive?"

Brawn bent over Hallet. He nodded.

"Put him in the airlock for the time being," said Burleigh. "And lock it. When he comes to, we'll decide what to do."

HARPER and Brawn took Hallet by the arms and hauled him along the passageway. The inner door of the lock clanged shut on him.

"We'll give him a hearing, of course," said Burleigh conscientiously. "But we should survey the situation first."

To Moran the situation required no survey, but he viewed it from a violently personal viewpoint which would neither require or allow discussion. He knew what he meant to do about Hallet. He said harshly;

"Go ahead. When you're through I'll tell you what will be done."

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HE went away. To the control-room. There he paced up and down, trying to beat back the fury which rose afresh at intervals of less than minutes. He did not think of his own situation, just then. There are more important things than survival.

He struggled for coolness, with the action before him known. He didn't glance out the ports at the half-mile circle in which vision was possible. Beyond the mist there might be anything; an ocean, swarming metropoli of giant insects, a mountain-range. Nobody on the *Nadine* had explored. But Moran did not think of such matters now. Hallet had tried to murder Carol, and Moran meant to take action, and there were matters which might result from it. The matter the crew of the *Malabar* had forgotten to attend to—.

He searched for paper and a pen. He found both in a drawer for the yacht's hand-written log. He wrote. He placed a small object in the drawer. He had barely closed it when Carol was at the control-room door. She said in a small voice;

"They want to talk to you."

He held up the paper.

"Read this later. Not now," he said curtly. He opened and closed the drawer again, this time putting the paper in it. "I want you to read this after the Hallet business is settled. I'm afraid that I'm not going to look well in your eyes."

She swallowed and did not speak. He went to where the others sat in official council. Burleigh said heavily;

"We've come to a decision. We shall call Hallet and hear what he has to say, but we had to consider various courses of action and decide which were possible and which were not."

Moran nodded grimly. He had made his own decision. It was not too much unlike the one that, carried out, had made him seize the *Nadine* for escape from Coryus. But he'd listen. Harper looked doggedly resolved. Brawn seemed moody as usual.

"I'm listening," said Moran.

"Hallet," said Burleigh regretfully, "intended to murder all of us and with your help take the *Nadine* to some place where he could hope to land without spaceport inspection."

Moran observed;

"He didn't discuss that part of his plans. He only asked if I'd make a deal to escape being marooned."

"Yes," said Burleigh, nodding. "I'm sure—"

"My own idea," said Moran, "when I tried to seize the *Nadine*, was to try to reach one of several newly-settled planets where things aren't too well organized. I'd memos of some such planets. I hoped to get to ground some-

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where in a wilderness on one of them and work my way on foot to a new settlement. There I'd explain that I'd been hunting or prospecting or something of the sort. On a settled planet that would be impossible. On a brand-new one people are less fussy and I might have been accepted quite casually."

"Hallet may have had some such idea in his mind," agreed Burleigh. "With a few bessendium crystals to show, he would seem a successful prospector. He'd be envied but not suspected. To be sure!"

"But," said Moran drily, "he'd be best off alone. So if he had that sort of idea, he intended to murder me too."

BURLEIGH nodded. "Undoubtedly. But to come to our decision. We can keep him on board under watch—as we did you—and leave you here. This has disadvantages. We owe you much. There would be risk of his taking someone unawares and fighting for his life. Even if all went as we wished, and we landed and dispersed, he could inform the space-port officials anonymously of what had happened, leading to investigation and the ruin of any plans for the future revival of our underground. Also, it would destroy any hope for your rescue."

Moran smiled wryly. He hadn't much hope of that, if he were marooned.

"We could leave him here," said Burleigh unhappily, "with you taking his identity for purposes of landing. But I do not think it would be wise to send a ship after him. He would be resentful. If rescued, he would do everything possible to spoil all our future lives, and we are fugitives."

"Ah, yes!" said Moran, still more wryly amused.

"I am afraid," said Burleigh reluctantly, "that we can only offer him his choice of being marooned or going out the airlock. I cannot think of any other alternative."

"I can," said Moran. "I'm going to kill him."

Burleigh blinked. Harper looked up sharply.

"We fight," said Moran grimly. "Armed exactly alike. He can try to kill me. I'll give him the same chance I have. But I'll kill him. They used to call it a duel, and they came to consider it a very immoral business. But that's beside the point. I won't agree to marooning him here. That's murder. I won't agree to throwing him out the air-lock. That's murder, too. But I have the right to kill him if it's in fair fight. That's justice! You can bring him in and let him decide if he wants to be marooned or fight me. I think he's just raging

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enough to want to do all the damage he can, now that his plans have gone sour."

Burleigh fidgeted. He looked at Harper. Harper nodded grudgingly. He looked at Brawn. Brawn nodded moodily.

Burleigh said fretfully, "Very well . . . Harper, you and Brawn bring him here. We'll see what he says. Be careful!"

Harper and Brawn went down the passageway. Moran saw them take out the blasters they'd worn since he took over the ship. They were ready. They unlocked and opened the inner airlock door.

There was silence. Harper looked shocked. He went in the airlock while Brawn stared, for once startled out of moodiness.

Harper came out.

"He's gone," he said in a flat voice. "Out the airlock."

ALL the rest went instantly to look. The airlock was empty. By the most natural and inevitable of oversights, when Hallet was put in it for a temporary cell, no one had thought of locking the outer door. There was no point in it. It only led out to the nightmare world. And out there Hallet would be in monstrous danger; he'd have no food. At most his only weapon would be the torch Moran had carried to the *Malabar* and brought back again. He could have no hope of any kind. He could feel only despair unthinkable and horror undiluted.

There was a buzzing sound in the airlock. A space-suit hung there. The helmet-phone was turned on. Hallet's voice came out, flat and metallic and desperate and filled with hate:

"What're you going to do now? You'd better think of a bargain to offer me! You can't lift off! I took the fuel-block so Moran couldn't afford to kill me after the rest of you were dead. You can't lift off the ground! Now give me a guarantee I can believe in or you stay here with me!"

Harper bolted for the engine-room. He came back, his face ashen. "He's right. It's gone. He took it."

Moran stirred. Burleigh wrung his hands. Moran reached down the space-suit from whose helmet the voice came tinnily. He began to put it on. Carol opened her lips to speak, and he covered the microphone with his palm.

"I'm going to go out and kill him," said Moran very quietly. "Somebody else had better come along just in case. But you can't make a bargain with him. He can't believe in any promise, because he wouldn't keep any."

Harper went away again. He came back, struggling into a space-suit. Brawn moved quickly. Burleigh suddenly stirred and went for a suit.

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"We want torches," said Moran evenly, "for our own safety, and blasters because they'll drop Hallet. Carol, you monitor what goes on. When we need to come back, you can use the direction-finder and talk us back to the yacht."

"But—but—"

"What are you going to do?" rasped the voice shrilly. *"You've got to make a bargain! I've got the fuel-block! You can't lift off without the fuel-block! You've got to make a deal."*

THE other men came back. With the microphone still muffled by his hand, Moran said sharply, "He has to keep talking until we answer, but he won't know we're on his trail until we do. We keep quiet when we get the helmets on. Understand?" Then he said evenly to Carol. "Look at that paper I showed you if—if anything happens. Don't forget! Ready?"

Carol's hands were clenched. She was terribly pale. She tried to speak, and could not. Moran, with the microphone still covered by the palm of his hand, repeated urgently;

"Remember, no talking! He'll pick up anything we say. Use gestures. Let's go!"

He swung out of the airlock. The others followed. The one certain thing about the direction Hallet would have taken was that it must be away from the wreck. And he'd have been in a panic to get out of sight from the yacht.

Moran saw his starting-point at once. Landing, the *Nadine* had used rockets for easing to ground because it is not possible to make delicate adjustments of interplanetary drive. A take-off, yes. But to land even at a space-port one uses rockets to cushion what otherwise might be a sharp impact. The *Nadine's* rockets had burned away the yeasty soil when she came to ground. There was a burnt-away depression down to bedrock in the stuff all around her. But Hallet had broken the scorched, crusty edge of the hollow as he climbed up to the blanket-like surface-skin.

Moran led the way after him. He moved with confidence. The springy, sickeningly uncertain stuff underfoot was basically white-that-had-been-soiled. Between the *Nadine's* landing-spot and the now-gutted wreck, it happened that only that one color showed. But, scattered at random in other places, there were patches of red mould and blue mould and black dusty rust and greenish surface-fungi. Twenty yards from the depression in which the *Nadine* lay, Hallet's footprints were clearly marked in a patch of orange-yellow ground-cover which gave off impalpable yellow spores when touched. Moran gestured for at-

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tention and pointed out the trail. He gestured again for the others to spread out.

Hallet's voice came again. He'd left the *Nadine's* lock because he could make no bargain for his life while in the hands of his companions. He could only bargain for his life if they could not find him or the precious fuel-block without which the *Nadine* must remain here forever. But from the beginning he knew such terror that he could not contrive, himself, a bargain that could possibly be made.

He chattered agitatedly, not yet sure that his escape had been discovered. At times he seemed almost hysterical. Moran and the others could hear him pant, sometimes, as a fancied movement aroused his panic. Once they heard the noise of his torch as he burned a safety-hole in the ground. But he did not use it. He hastened on. He talked desperately. Sometimes he boasted, and sometimes he tried cunningly to be reasonable. But he hadn't been prepared for the absolute failure of what should have been the simplest and surest form of multiple murder. Now in a last ditch stand, he hysterically abused them for taking so long to realize that they had to make a deal.

HIS four pursuers went grimly over the elastic surface of this world upon his trail. The *Nadine* faded into the mist. Off to the right a clump of toadstools grew. They were taller than any of the men, and their pulpy stalks were more than a foot thick. Hallet's trail in the colored surface-moulds went on. The giant toadstools were left behind. The trail led straight toward an enormous object the height of a three-storey house. When first glimpsed through the mist, it looked artificial. But as they drew near they saw that it was a cabbage; gigantic, with leaves impossibly huge and thick. There was a spike in its middle on which grew cruciform faded flowers four feet across.

Then Hallet screamed. They heard it in their helmet-phones. He screamed again. Then for a space he was silent, gasping, and then he uttered shrieks of pure horror. But they were cries of horror, not of pain.

Moran found himself running, which was probably ridiculous. The others hastened after him. And suddenly the mistiness ahead took on a new appearance. The ground fell away. It became evident that the *Nadine* had landed upon a plateau with levels below it and very possibly mountains rising above. But here the slightly rolling plateau fell sheer away. There was a place where the yeasty soil—but here it was tinted with a purplish overcast of foleate fungus—where the soil

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had given way. Something had fallen, here.

It would have been Hallet. He'd gone too close to a precipice, moving agitatedly in search of a hiding-place in which to conceal himself until the people of the *Nadine* made a deal he could no longer believe in.

His cries still came over the helmet-phones. Moran went grimly to look. He found himself gazing down into a crossvalley perhaps two hundred feet deep. At the bottom there was the incredible, green growing things. But they were not trees. They were some flabby weed with thick reddish stalks and enormous pinnate leaves. It grew here to the height of oaks. But Hallet had not dropped so far.

From anchorages on bare rock, great glistening cables reached downward to other anchorages on the valley floor. The cables crossed each other with highly artificial precision at a central point. They formed the foundation for a web of geometrically accurate design and unthinkable size. Crosscables of sticky stuff went round and round the center of the enormous snare, following a logarithmic spiral with absolute exactitude. It was a spider's web whose cables stretched hundreds of feet; whose bird-limed ropes would trap and hold even the monster insects of this world. And Hallet was caught in it.

HE'D tumbled from the cliff-edge as fungoid soil gave way under him. He'd bounced against a sloping, fungus-covered rocky wall and with fragments of curdy stuff about him had been flung out and into the snare. He was caught as firmly as any of the other creatures on which the snare's owner fed.

His shrieks of horror began when he realized his situation. He struggled, setting up insane vibrations in the fabric of the web. He shrieked again, trying to break the bonds of cordage that clung the more horribly as he struggled to break free. And the struggling was most unwise.

"We want to cut the cables with torches," said Moran sharply. "If we can make the web drop we'll be all right. Webspiders don't hunt on the ground. Go ahead! Make it fast!"

Burleigh and the others hastened to what looked like a nearly practicable place by which to descend. Moran moved swiftly to where one cable of the web was made fast at the top. It was simple sanity to break down the web —by degrees, of course—to get at Hallet. But Hallet did not cooperate. He writhed and struggled and shrieked.

His outcry, of course, counted for nothing in the satanic cacophony that filled the air. All the monsters of all the planet seemed to make discordant nois-

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es. Hallet could add nothing. But his struggles in the web had meaning to the owner of the trap.

They sent tiny tremblings down the web-cables. And this was the fine mathematical creation of what was quaintly called a "garden spider" on other worlds. *Epeira fasciata.* She was not in it. She sat sluggishly in a sheltered place, remote from her snare. But a line, a cord, a signal-cable went from the center of the web to the spider's retreat. She waited with implacable patience, one foreleg—sheathed in ragged and somehow revolting fur—resting delicately upon the line. Hallet's frantic struggles shook the web. Faintly, to be sure, but distinctively. The vibrations were wholly unlike the violent, thrashing struggles of a heavy beetle or a giant cricket. They were equally unlike those flirtatious, seductive pluckings of a web-cable which would mean that an amorous male of her own species sought the grisly creature's affection.

Hallet made the web quiver as small prey would shake it. The spider would have responded instantly to bigger game, if only to secure it before the vast snare was damaged by frenzied plungings. Still, though there was no haste, the giant rose and in leisurely fashion traversed the long cable to the web's center. Moran saw it.

"Hallet!" he barked into his helmet-phone, "Hallet! Hold still! Don't move!"

He raced desperately along the edge of the cliff, risking a fall more immediately fatal than Hallet's. It was idiotic to make such an attempt at rescue. It was sheer folly. But there are instincts one has to obey against all reason. Moran did not think of the fuel-block. Typically, Hallet did.

"I've got the fuel-block," he gasped between screams. *"If you don't help me—"*

But then the main cable nearest him moved in a manner not the result of his own struggles. It was the enormous weight of the owner of the web, moving leisurely on her own snare, which made the web shake now. And Hallet lost even the coherence of hysteria and simply shrieked.

MORAN came to a place where a main anchor-cable reached bed-rock. It ran under yeasty ground-cover to an anchorage. He thrust his torch deep, feeling for the cable. It seared through. The web jerked wildly as one of its principal supports parted. The giant spider turned aside to investigate the event. Such a thing should happen only when one of the most enormous of possible victims became entangled.

Moran went racing for another

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cable-anchorage. But when he found where the strong line fastened, it was simply and starkly impossible to climb down to it. He swore and looked desperately for Burleigh and Brawn and Harper. They were far away, hurrying to descend but not yet where they could bring the web toppling down by cutting other cables.

The yellow-banded monster came to the cut end of the line. It swung down. It climbed up again. Hallet shrieked and kicked.

The spider moved toward him. Of all nightmarish creatures on this nightmare of a planet, a giant spider with a body eight feet long and legs to span as many yards was most revolting. Its abdomen was obscenely swollen. As it moved, its spinnerets paid out newly-formed cord behind it. Its eyes were monstrous and murderously intent. The ghastly, needle-sharp mandibles beside its mouth seemed to move lustfully with a life of their own. And it was somehow ten times more horrible because of its beastly fur. Tufts of black hairiness, half-yards in length, streamed out as its legs moved.

There was another cable still. Moran made for it. He reached it where it stretched down like a slanting tight-rope. He jerked out his torch to sever it,—and saw that to cut it would be to drop the spider almost upon Hallet. It would seize him then because of his writhings. But not to cut it—

He tried his blaster. He fired again and again. The blaster-bolts hurt. The spider reacted with fury. The blaster would have killed a man at this distance, though it would have been ignored by a chitin-armored beetle. But against the spider the bolts were like bites. They made small wounds, but not serious ones. The spider made a bubbling sound which was more daunting than any cry would have been. It flung its legs about, fumbling for the thing that it believed attacked it. It continued the bubbling sounds. Its mandibles clashed and gnashed against each other. They were small noises in the din which was the norm on this mad world, but they were more horrible than any other sounds Moran had ever heard.

THE spider suddenly began to move purposefully toward the spot where Hallet jerked insanely and shrieked in heart-rending horror.

Moran found himself attempting the impossible. He knew it was impossible. The blast-pistol hurt but did not injure the giant because the range was too long. So—it was totally unjustifiable—he found himself slung below

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the downward-slanting cable and sliding down its slope. He was going to where the range would be short enough for his blast-pistol to be effective. He slid to a cross-cable, and avoided it and went on.

Burleigh and Brawn and Harper were tiny figures, very far away. Moran hung by one hand and used his free hand to fire the blaster once more. It hurt more seriously, now. The spider made bubbling noises of infinite ferocity. And it moved with incredible agility toward the one object it could imagine as meaning attack.

It reached Hallet. It seized him.

Moran's blast-pistol could not kill it. It had to be killed. Now! He drew out his torch and pressed the continuous-flame stud. Raging, he threw it at the spider.

It spun in the air, a strange blue-white pinwheel in the gray light of this planet's day. It cut through a cable that might have deflected it. It reached the spider, now reared high and pulling Hallet from the sticky stuff that had captured him.

The spinning torch hit. The flame burned deep. The torch actually sank into the spider's body.

And there was a titanic flame and an incredible blast and Moran knew nothing.

A LONG time later he knew that he ached. He became aware that he hurt. Still later he realized that Burleigh and Brawn and Harper stood around him. He'd splashed in some enormous thickness of the yeasty soil, grown and fallen from the cliff-edge, and it was not solid enough to break his bones. Harper, doubtless, had been most resolute in digging down to him and pulling him out.

He sat up, and growled at innumerable unpleasant sensations.

"That," he said painfully, "was a very bad business."

"It's all bad business," said Burleigh in a flat and somehow exhausted tone. "The fuel-block burned. There's nothing left of it or Hallet or the spider."

Moran moved an arm. A leg. The other arm and leg. He got unsteadily to his feet.

"It was bessendium and uranium," added Burleigh hopelessly. "And the uranium burned. It wasn't an atomic explosion, it just burned like sodium or potassium would do. But it burned fast! The torch-flame must have reached it." He added absurdly. "Hallet died instantly, of course. Which is better fortune than we are likely to have."

"Oh, that . . ." said Moran. "We're all right. I said I was going to kill him. I wasn't trying to at the moment, but I did. By

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accident." He paused, and said dizzily; "I think he should feel obliged to me. I was distinctly charitable to him!"

Harper said grimly;

"But we can't lift off. We're all marooned here now."

Moran took an experimental step. He hurt, but he was sound.

"Nonsense!" he said. "The crew of the *Malabar* went off without taking the fuel-block from the wreck's engines. It's in a drawer in the *Nadine's* control-room with a note to Carol that I asked her to read should something happen to me. We may have to machine it a little to make it fit the *Nadine's* engines. But we're all right!"

Carol's voice came in his helmet-phone. It was shaky and desperately glad.

"You're—all right? Quite all right? Please hurry back?"

"We're on the way," said Moran.

HE was pleased with Carol's reaction. He also realized that now there would be the right number of people on the *Nadine;* they would take off from this world and arrive reasonably near due-time at Loris without arousing the curiosity of space-port officials.

He looked about him. The way the others had come down was a perfectly good way to climb up again. On the surface, above, their trail would be clear on the multi-colored surface rusts. There were four men together, all with blast-pistols and three with torches. They should be safe.

Moran talked cheerfully, climbing to the plateau on which the *Nadine* had landed, trudging with the others across a world on which it was impossible to see more than a quarter-mile in any direction. But the way was plain. Beyond the mist Carol waited.

THE END

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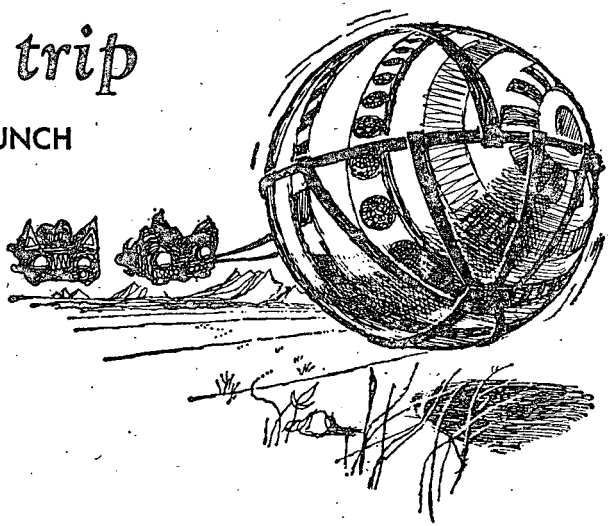
the survey trip

By DAVID R. BUNCH

Illustrator WALKER



With commendable courage, David Bunch returns to the wars with another of his peppermint-striped plea-warnings. Friends and foes, read on!

IT was in the land of Knockjonesbrainsout in the years of the squeeze that I saw him wiring and welding. He had a metal suit that was shaped somewhat like a heart, and he was shaped like the suit. "I'm fixing myself in," he said sidewise to me as I came by rolling my colored beach ball in the loll way while the sun burned across a sky of hot-blue, and people scurried and hurried.

"So you're fixing yourself in?" I said.

"Yeh," he continued, "now is the time, and soon 'twill be riding time, and when I go I figure to ride through in steel. I'm not feudal, but still it's the age for containers."

"You look like a heart," I said then, and I tried to do it aghast, though nothing surprises me that much, certainly. But still, I thought he deserved some flutter from me. After all, when anyone goes to all that effort, and a suit to match!

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"Yeh," he said resignedly

"Well . . . !" I said. I twiddled my big, striped beach ball that I roll in dry and wet country. I tried to keep it on the blue. I find the blue stripe is fitting for almost any day. "Well . . . !?" I said.

"Would you care to go?" he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"With me," he said, "on a survey."

"I'm not doing anything," I admitted. "But I'd have to bring Roscoe."

"Roscoe?" he wondered.

I TWITCHED an elbow in the direction of whom I meant. Roscoe behaved on a blue stripe. It even surprised Mr. Heart. "Surely," he said finally, "bring Roscoe. Do you have horses?"

"Horses!?" I asked. "Say, how old are you?"

"Wouldn't care to say," he said.

"Horses went out way back with Grandpa's beard," I told Mr. Heart, using a patience I seldom use. Somehow I liked Mr. Heart.

"Ho ho," said Mr. Heart, "and ha ha too. I know what you mean. But wait till you see what I mean." He struck then two metal hands together and made a steel clash. And he moowroonked low, like the mating call of a frog. And though it was low, it shook nine city blocks. Roscoe, for all his displacement, heaved up in the air like the start-up of a driven golf ball. "Hey! watch what you're doing," I cried out at Mr. Heart. But something whizzing took the air from what I'd said until not even I was sure whether or not I'd said it. Metal sheets whammed by like the beginning of the great day of the uncapped manholes, and the whinny the neighing steeds made sounded like horns tied down at noon.

"How do you like Gasbelly?" asked Mr. Heart.

I looked and I was overwhelmed. I couldn't say a word. I licked my lips, I flapped my tongue, I took in all the breath I could, but nothing happened. Gasbelly had me speechless all right. Mr. Heart saw that.

"Gasbelly is ready," said Mr. Heart. "And if you ride with me, you'll somehow have to match him. With horsepower."

"But how?" I asked.

"Anything for a pal," said Mr. Heart as he jerked a hacksaw loose from behind an ear and sawed a Gasbelly in half the long way. This Gasbelly proved to be full of a lot of little Gasbellies. They lined up in a long line and grew. Then they began to move. "Quick! throw your line on the one you want," shouted Mr. Heart. So I threw a piece of loose cable around a lively sorrel job, and I saw Mr. Heart had a gray. "These'll take us," said Mr.

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Heart, "these'll really bear us." And I said, "Yes," out of breath.

We mounted up, Mr. Heart in his metal suit, and I in my bathing suit, though we were in the dry country. "What'll we call our horses?" asked Mr. Heart.

"How about Gasbag for mine and Gassack for yours?" I suggested.

"Oh splendid," said Mr. Heart. "That way we'll never forget Gasbelly. What's with Roscoe?"

"He can walk," I said. "I'll lead him in a special harness on a halter." So we got started, and perhaps we were a strange group. "Roscoe can be the dog," I said to Mr. Heart.

"What a splendid idea!" agreed Mr. Heart. "A beach-ball dog—it's a new thing!"

"I'll take papers out on him tomorrow," I replied. "And when we pass field trials, we'll just enter the pooch."

"Splendid," said Mr. Heart, "splendid. And he might win. But on the other hand, there's always convention, of course, and some people expect dogs on legs."

"I know," I said, "I know. But anything might happen, and has of course."

SO we rolled on through the land of Knockjonesbrainsout in the years of the squeeze. The people of that vast country were whamming each others brains out, slamming each others guts, and a kick in the pants was the least you could get from a cousin or a brother. The milk of human kindness was the color of good port wine where the dead stacked, and the people loved each other, just like that. We met five Legs who said they were of that benevolent brotherhood called Kick-a-Brother-Good, and they'd surely been doing it, and now they were a little pooped, excuse them please, they had to be getting on. So they whammed us five good ones ere they passed, and we lifted our hats in admiration toward the sheer audacity of them all and quaintness of the club.

When we came to the hall of the giant Sumwoy Gitit, we were ready for refreshments. So we parked everything behind sculptured hedgerows and skipped in by bridge, across mock-moat. And the giant Sumwoy Gitit wasn't, when you caught him with his business pants off, a giant at all! He was just a skimpy little wrinkle-up with no hair, false teeth, gumboils, dirty nails, and he had ulcers all over the insides of his food's place. When Mr. Heart bobbed in and confronted him with the metal suit, Sumwoy stared and rubbed his eyes twice and looked at a glass he'd been drinking stuff from. Then he shrieked, "Oh God, my God," and he rang a big noise out of a tiny black button on a mahogany wall. A servant came as though

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life were at stake, though only job was, and stood hand-rubby near and deferential-ready before little Sumwoy Gitit. "Louis!" said Gitit, for Louis was the servant's name, "for God's sake, Louis, get Deks on the accounts for charities and have him increase everything by a million and a half of the good long green. For, oh God, I have just seen the worst thing: a heart in a metal suit. Weeooh!" Louis cleared his throat, stood hand-rubby near and deferential-ready another second and tried to ooze sympathy. So the old guy had cracked at last, thought Louis, some more. Then he went to see that all the charities were duly increased by a million and a half of the good long green.

"Please, Mr. Gitit," said Mr. Heart, "we're tired and thirsty. We've been riding Gasbag and Gassack for many a long mile, and leading Roscoe too. Do you think we could have, maybe, a tiny piece of pie? And maybe a bone too, huh, for Roscoe?"

SUMWOY Gitit flung his arms toward the ceiling, hit his ears, rubbed his eyes and took on the green look of fear. "A heart in a tin can, and it talks," he muttered. Then he seized his glass and cracked it a thousand ways against a wall. When he stood then with his small shoulders heaving, padded in the rich robe before the imitation fireplace, he was just an old and little man who couldn't fling his accumulations at the Dark. For the Dark stared noncommittal from the ornate halls and many rooms, and didn't care even a little wormy fig for Mr. Sumwoy Gitit's accumulations. But the Dark had, to be sure, some ribboned flowers for Gitit, and people around a hole—very soon now; he knew that. So Sumwoy chewed his false teeth down on many fearful little thoughts while the imitation fire filled the room with a kind of nothing . . .

When again we were mounted up on Gasbag and Gassack, Mr. Heart said, "You know, I felt kind of sorry for Mr. Gitit. Because he didn't really. If you know what I mean."

I could but nod, "Yes," into the wind of riding as we lifted our mounts to great speed. Roscoe rolled behind in his special harness and halter. We were going to call on some figures.

We arrived at Dustt just before bedtime, late one night, and found a man known as Mr. Go-Gus-Go 8-to-5 and a dieted body known as Miss 9-to-5-No-Time-Off-For-Lunch. I let Mr. Heart do the talking, and he got right down to the interview. Pretty soon he pinned it all with a question. "Do you people really approve of Mr. Sumwoy Gitit, his wormy attitudes, business meth-

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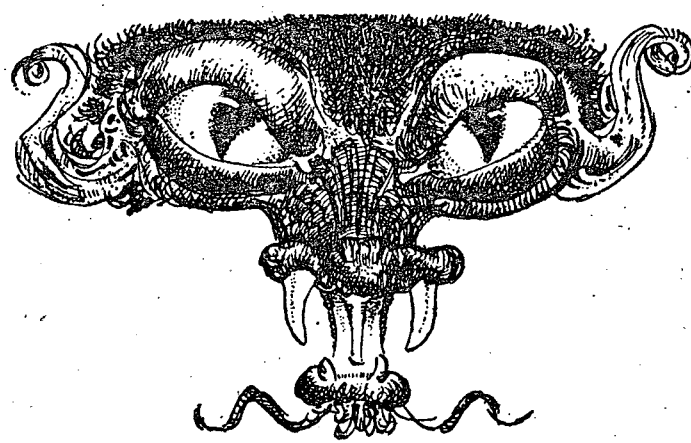
ods and general activities?" asked Mr. Heart. "We work for him!" said she without much thinking. "Yeah," answered he without thinking at all, "he's our whole ideal!" Mr. Heart then said, "OH!" in a stricken breath-choked voice of deepest concern and fainted dead away on the spot. So I dragged him out in the hall, tossed water on him for awhile, got his heels up and his head down for awhile and we left as soon as we could.

When again we are on our way, Mr. Heart didn't say a word. He just rode with all of him in the metal container. "When I see something like we just saw," I said, "I always want to take a good long swim 'way out somewhere to where its clear and miles deep and icy cold too, and never come back anymore at all unless I have to." Mr. Heart popped his head out of the metal neck-hole. But he couldn't speak at all.

We rode on and on then, across many strange miles and through several weathers. And everywhere we found people who were just Sumwoy Gitit and 8-to-5 and 9-to-5 over and over so much that Mr. Heart rode more and more finally with nothing out of his metal suit but the appendages required to ride Gassack. I rode Gasbag, noncommittal, and cared only for Roscoe, the beach-ball dog. Somehow I knew even in his hollow hide he was as good as all kinds of people, and long ago I had become resigned, had made my peace with eventualities, as well as with sun, wind and rainy weather. When we came to a piece of water, I would swim and not care; I would lie in the sun. Mr. Heart, who still hoped and still cared, cried almost all the time, riding in his metal envelope. **THE END**



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Shakespeare wrote it, in the tragedy of King Lear

—a phrase to live by:

Men must endure

Their going hence, even as their coming hither;

Ripeness Is All

By JESSE ROARKE

Illustrator SUMMERS

HE was disturbed, but he did not know it. Murky, agitated waters crept up in his vast subconscious world, and sought the threshold, the mouth of the pit, the slope of the clean shore; little rainbows of light now and then flashed over the waters. They heaved, and against the sluicegates they beat, sullenly. There was a yielding, but the great force was contained.

He left his Pad, curiously mopping his brow a little, and furrowing it between the eyes. It came to him that he was hungry. He stepped to the curb, pushed the button, and leaned against the post, as if waiting, or in thought. Almost immediately a Car appeared, in a cheery orange and green. He almost shuddered, and he almost knew that he did so. Then he brightened, stepped into the car, and voiced his desire.

He was carried at a moderate pace through clean, broad streets and past bright, shiny buildings and smiling parks and gardens. He came to the top of a high hill, saw the sparkling blue bay in the distance, and thought vaguely of sailing upon it. On his face he felt a brisk spray, and the air was tanged with salt. Then a warmed, faintly perfumed glow dried and composed him, and the

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Car shut off all its machinery and glided to a stop. He got out, ever so comfortable, and entered a luxurious Kitchen, in which he had not dined for several days.

The doors opened automatically, and a smiling android, gaily featured and clothed, conducted him to a table. She was a soothing sight: yes, that's what it was. He ordered a sumptuous meal, rubbing his ample waistline in anticipation.

"Dig dig!" crooned the waitress.

He patted good-naturedly her well-moulded behind as she turned; she glowed sweetly back over her soft and delicate shoulder. He wondered if Meg was enough, and decided that, well, for the time being, he guessed she was. No use hurrying things. The waitress returned and served the meal. As always, it was excellent. He finished with a leisurely bottle of wine and a cigar, pinched the waitress's firm yet ever so yielding thigh, and departed.

Then a deep stirring almost took hold upon him. Yes, that was what he needed. It had been several months now. He pushed another button, and a rosy pink Car appeared to his service. "Take me to a House, you know what I mean?" he said, as he arranged himself upon the pearl grey cushions. The Car glided away.

ON and on along the shore of the ocean they pleasantly careened. At length they turned into a rich garden bower, and stopped in front of a great mansion overlooking the waves. He alighted; the Car departed. Profusely bloomed scarlet and golden and azure flowers, everywhere; succulent and bright was the lavish green. The doors opened, and a Woman received him. She was past child-bearing, motherly, and smiling.

He smiled back, and said, "You got one, huh?"

"Of course," she answered.

He sat down to wait.

And while he waited, he almost thought. Meg was good, all right, but why wasn't she enough, sometimes? He tapped his thumb-nail against his teeth in a few moments of near perplexity, and then desisted. Soon a bevy of charming Girls entered the room and paraded for him, laughing and smiling. He settled upon a petite brunette with cherry lips. She stripped him of his clothes, and they went walking in a private garden.

In an inner bower they sat down to a rustic table, and were served by robot with a heady aphrodisiac wine. On the grasses and the petals of flowers, overlooking the sea, they entwined their limbs and their bodies, and he nearly enjoyed her. He thought that once he had enjoyed

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this activity indeed, and wondered whether it were so.

He sat looking over the waters, trying to muse. The androids were physically perfect, flesh meeting flesh, clinging to it, thrilling with it. They were warm, they whispered, they strained and cried. They were freely available, for every man and woman. None need be unsatisfied.

But he did not know all of this, history and psychology were lost to him and he could never keep a connected train of thought; his being unsatisfied could not penetrate to his consciousness. He did not quite know that flesh cried out for something more than flesh, and had always done so. He did know, more or less, that there was the matter of population, and that real men and real women had, at mysterious intervals, to copulate. That was the way it was. He had once spent some time in a House himself, meeting the requirements of an endless variety of Girls. He supposed that some of them had borne the issue of his seed, though he did not suppose it in these terms. But it was better not to know these things for certain, and not to have anything to do with the rearing of children, after the early mother-feeling was over. The Schools could take care of that better than people could.

She snuggled against him.

"What say, Man?" she said: "What's eatin yuh?"

He did not know how to answer. He tried to talk, tried to break through, to clarify.

"What's it, huh?" he nearly pleaded. "All this, I mean. Like what's it for?"

She stretched out on the grass and looked at him a moment.

"Search me," she ventured. "I guess maybe what you need's a Bed."

He guessed she was right.

THEY went back to the mansion through the twilight, and established themselves in one of the rooms. The soft curtains were drawn, the Bed was large, the sheets were silky and creamy. She reclined on her back, and the mattress moulded itself perfectly to her form.

He lay down beside her, and caressed her. She clasped him tight to her breast. And he was clasped also by an invisible but very palpable field of energy, that directed his movements and charged him with an inexhaustible and ceaseless power. He held her tight, and the force entwined them. They were one throbbing ecstasy, and only at the very last endurable moment were they given release.

Then the Bed slowly soothed them, massaged them, and invigorated them once again. Throughout the night it contin-

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ued, activity and repose, until toward the dawn he fell into a dead sleep, which lasted until the following morning.

He did not know that he dreamed. He did not consciously remember any of it. He only knew, as he ate his ample breakfast, that he was not so thoroughly at peace as he should have been. And he knew that it was useless to ask the Woman, or one of the Girls.

But the Woman's androids did well by her, it seemed. Maybe he had better go home to Meg.

"What the square, anyhow?" he said to himself. A little more rest in his familiar surroundings, and he would be all right. A Bed always took a lot out of a man. He arose to go.

"Goodbye, dear," the Woman said, as he came to the head of the main path. She was serene and smiling.

He adjusted his tunic, and smiled in reply. Yes sir, the old world was in good shape, just like always. He signaled for a Car. The bright ocean again passed by him, and the broad sands, and he dozed.

THE dreams were more importunate, this time. When he awoke, with a blank start, the Car was cruising aimlessly. He looked around, and broke into a sweat. There was a button he had to push, somewhere, there was a handle he had to take hold of. He stammered out "Stop—now!" and stepped onto the curb. The car sped away, to another summons. He was before an Emporium, but he did not enter. Instead, he did an unprecedented thing: he went for a walk, through the streets of the City. This was not done, and none of the occupants of the passing cars observed him.

He was really wondering, now. Could something be wrong? This possibility, with all its full horror, had never entered his mind before; indeed, he did not even have the conceptions of rightness and wrongness, and yet there was the inescapable word, "wrong". His agitation increased. He found himself with the hardly formulated idea that a school was a place where one learned something, and he did not know what this could mean.

He thought of the School that he had attended. All the young people of the District of Fransco attended it: they had been told that there were other Schools, in other districts, and that they were all the same. He had believed it, and forgotten about it. What did it matter? One district was as good as another. He had never travelled. He knew a Man who had gone to the District of Shasta, but he had not been interested in hearing about it. He remembered that the Man had said it was all the same thing,

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not worth the bother. One had everything he needed, in his own place. But now it seemed that he needed something more, something nobody had ever heard of. He walked on, thinking about the School.

Everybody was born in a House, and kept there till he was weaned, and could walk. Then he was taken to the School. There he grew up in an atmosphere of Group Living, and was gradually showed everything that he needed—everything that there was. The hes and shes played together; they were instructed in the Ways of Life.

As they grew older, they were taken around the City. They were showed the places that the Cars could take them; they were showed how to push the buttons. Of course the robots did a perfect job of instruction. There were Kitchens, in which one could eat. There were parks and gardens, in which one could stroll and lounge. There were Emporiums, in which one could get clothes and things. It was all —as it was.

When one reached puberty, he was taken from the School, and given a Pad. There he lived, listening to the soft music that came from the walls, eating and sleeping. And doing. He selected his android from an Emporium, and did her as he pleased. She was his company, the Warmth of his Pad. She shopped in the Emporium for him, she fixed him cozy little meals, and brought him his pipe or his cigar. She spread the depilatory cream upon his face in the morning, and wiped, with so soft a touch, his beard away; and she bathed him, in the scented waters.

HE remembered that after a year or two, he had felt almost restless. From his touch, Meg had understood. She had whispered "House" to him, and he had gone out and instructed a Car. That had been his first experience of a Girl. He supposed that it had been the same with the others. He had never inquired. In the garden bower the idea of children had come to him, and his mind had been at rest. He had not tried a Bed until the fifth or sixth time. He had, he supposed, taken for granted that the Girls lived in the same way that he did. They had their own androids, their own Pads. They never associated with the Men, except in a House. Men got together sometimes, and ate and drank, and had android orgies; no doubt the Girls did likewise.

With a great effort, aided by hints from what he could remember of Life, he pieced an idea together, not knowing what he had done. Of course human copulation was too dangerous: it

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might make one unhappy. He had learned, in the bowers, that Man and Girl were not of the same temper, and that their union was not always perfect. Somehow it was better, even so, but it was too difficult. It tended to be—painful.

He did not know the word. He did not know any of the words for these strange thoughts of his, but they were now very palpable to him, and very urgent. His android was his, and was never dissatisfied; and so, neither was he. It was a perfect and complete system. And what was happening to him? The word "happiness" came upon him, and he shuddered, almost in terror. What did it mean? Too many things were happening, all at once.

HE turned into a street, and stopped. He had never seen it before. But why should this disturb him? The District was a big place. But he thought he had better get out of this street. Maybe pick up another android, maybe even take her home: have a redhead for awhile, maybe. Meg wouldn't mind. How could she? What was the matter with him? Other Men changed readily, or kept a whole Padful. The waitresses were much in demand. One did not even have to take them home: there were convenient rooms in every Kitchen.

Then suddenly all this was shaken from him. He was standing before a large building, and he did not know what it was.

He stood for a long time, looking at it. Now and then a Man seemed to pass, but he could not be sure. It was like a shadow, like the flickering of a breeze. He wondered what the building could be.

At length he seemed to hear a murmur as of the waters, and at last a voice broke upon him.

"This is a library", it said. "There are books here, and teachers, from whom you can learn."

It was too much. He screamed, and ran down the street.

After a few blocks he became calmer; forgetfulness rescued him. He pushed a button, and a Car conveyed him to his Pad.

Meg met him, all warmth and smiles. He sat down, and she brought him his slippers and a cold bottle of beer. He drank deeply. She sat on the arm of his chair, caressed him, and asked if he would like some dinner. She had—

He cut her short.

"Meg, honey", he said, "I'm a little tired, that's how. You go to bed now, huh, put on some of that jasmine perfume? You dig?"

"Sure, honey! Dig dig!" she replied.

The dark waters rose, and beat against him.

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He finished his beer, and got himself another.

Meg whispered, "Say, honey!" The bed rustled softly.

He fought down his mind, and rapidly drank his beer. Almost as ever, he embraced the Warmth, and slid into a comfortable oblivion. Meg lay beside him in the darkness.

HE awoke early, and she laid her hand upon him.

Abruptly, he squirmed away.

"Don't do that!" His voice was loud. "It's no good, all that stuff! Something's—wrong!"

He jumped out of bed, and began rapidly to put on his clothes.

Meg lay still for a moment. Her circuits were not built for such things. There was nothing wrong, and nothing registered. Then the cheery morning music started out of the wall, soothing and bright, and she began to hum with it. She arose, went lightly to her dressing, freshly and sweetly tripped into the kitchen.

"Scrambled eggs, honey?" she asked, in the most caressive of tones.

He had all but forgotten his outburst.

"Yeh, sure honey", he answered.

He ate copiously, and drank several cups of black coffee.

"Fine day!" he said, belching his appreciation.

He patted his companion good morning, exceptionally affectionately, and went out into the street.

There he met an old friend and drinking companion. He lived next door, it seemed. They were neighbors! He had seldom been so glad to see anyone, as this old friend.

"Hi there, Charlie!" he boomed. "How's it all? Like Man, I'm glad to see you! What's it, huh?"

Then he waited, with an expectant grin. He waited a considerable time after Charlie had sauntered past him and ridden off in a Car.

Then it came to him.

"He didn't see me! Like as if I wasn't here! Yeah!"

He hurried down the street, and did not think of a Car at all.

He slowed his pace, and walked for a long time. Nobody saw him. He tried to think. The effort was too much, and his mind was a strained blank, and almost pained him. This street: it seemed familiar. Yes, he had gone cruising here, several times. He began very nearly to regret his deficiency of memory. Wasn't there a nice park, up here a little way? He quickened his pace, perspiring freely. It was right here —no, it couldn't be! Not that again! He couldn't be invisible to other people! There couldn't be things all around him that he

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couldn't see! It wasn't right! What did that word mean? He fainted.

When he came to, the library was still there. He staggered to his feet, and stood still a moment, gazing. There was something cut in the stone over the large front doors. Why would anybody cut something like that in the stone? It didn't make sense. It wasn't comfy at all.

Then, in the back of his brain, a little light burst, and he heard the words, "All men by nature desire to know."

There it was again. Hadn't he dreamed it? What was this "know"? It wasn't eating or drinking or doing or anything.

Then there floated into his pulsating areas this "Aristotle".

No dig at all. But he knew that it was the inscription in the stone, and he walked up the broad front walk and entered the doors, which opened automatically for him.

He walked over the marble floor. Out of the corner of his eye he seemed almost to discern an occasional dim figure hurrying past. He walked up two flights of stairs, seemingly alone, and yet seemingly surrounded. It was strange, and it was perfectly natural. He had never felt so alive before. Not even in a Bed had he felt himself so much of a Man. And he did not think about doing. He had not the slightest interest in it. He wanted to *know*, whatever this might mean. He paused in front of a door. It opened, and he entered and eased himself into a chair.

"You must begin with the alphabet", the voice began. "This is the letter A."

It flashed upon the screen. He copied it on the plate before him. Over and over again he copied the letter, and heard its name repeated. He was on the way.

HE remained for weeks, for months, in the library. His room was comfortable, his meals were tasty and well balanced. He lost weight, he gained continually an alert, aware sense of well-being and purpose. He was developing a mind, and beginning to know.

Throughout the day he studied consciously, or received hypnotic instruction; during the night, while his sleep was more keen and more restful than ever before, the instruction continued. He learned many things. He became aware of who Aristotle was, and what he had done. He developed an acquaintance with all the great men and cultures of the lost lands of Europa. He learned that he lived on the west coast of Ameru, and that this coast was one large City; he learned that the once large continent had dwindled greatly in the disasters, that the ocean waves

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now poured over the great plains, and all to the eastward. He felt occasionally a longing to see the mountains, and the further waters.

He learned and throve. He began to see other figures more distinctly: once in the corridor he met a Man face to face, and they smiled and bowed to each other. It had been a small Man, with a funny beard, and very bright eyes. It had not been like anybody he had ever seen in the City. But suddenly he knew that he was not like anybody in the City, and that it could no longer be his home. The shock of the fact that the City was not everything, that there was existence, and desirable existence, outside of it, came to him strongly; but now he was ready for it. When the tumult was over, his mind was at last born, and he was a human being, ready to aim for high goals, and to co-operate with destiny.

That night much of a strange nature, called "Sunrise", came to him, and strange names, faces, and disciplines were vaguely lodged within him. He awoke with a most definite feeling of readiness, and with his breakfast he knew, beyond doubt, that "When the disciple is ready, the Master appears."

When he had finished eating, he left the library, and walked in thought. How dismal everything was! Nobody knowing, or caring about anything really important; nobody seeing anything. And certainly they did not see him: but he saw them very clearly. And how much was there, still to be seen, all around him? And what was it, what did it mean? He had to get out, he had to find an answer.

He pushed the nearest button, and slid into the suave black Car that noiselessly approached. He had never seen a black Car before. He wondered if his eyes were still playing tricks upon him, if he would ever see anything aright. Then he dismissed it from his mind.

"Take me out of the City", he said.

There was a slight hesitation; then they were moving, slowly and quietly, in a northeasterly direction.

IT was a long ride, past all the familiar features of the City, multiplied many fold. At length the Car shuddered slightly, and the virtue seemed to go out of it in a gentle rush: it stopped, utterly still, and the silent door slid open with an eloquent finality. He got out, and the Car seemed to hasten away as from an undesired doom.

But his weird was upon him; he thought so, in the transfixing old terms; and he turned and beheld an open field, with moun-

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tains in the distance. And it came to him that he had ridden this way before, and seen nothing but City all around him. He thought then of enigmatic things that he had heard and read in the library: of how certain Tibetans rendered themselves invisible, or at least passed unseen, by shielding their thought waves—by giving out no handle for perception to grasp. So had this landscape hidden itself, it seemed: shielded itself from desecration.

Or perhaps there were beings, perhaps there was existence, that gave continual indication, bristled with handles, as it were: but handles that could not be grasped or made use of by an organism insufficiently developed. It seemed more of a truism, the more he thought of it.

But it did not seem to matter, on this bright new day. He dismissed the question and stepped forward, into the yielding grass.

What a great thing it was to have a mind, to feel alive on such a day! He tried to remember how dim, how crippled he had been; it seemed impossible. Could he have been only one poor, flickering candle, he who now blazed with the light of a hundred, or a thousand?, Could he have rattled on one cylinder, he who now moved smoothly and noiselessly on sixteen or twenty? It was too marvelous for words, or for thoughts.

For a long time he walked, perspiring freely, then puffing, limping and laboring. It was hot, with no breezes from the sea. An occasional rill was refreshing, and a glade was cooling: the leaves rustled gently in the now and then quickened air, and the birds were sweet with song. But there was no sign of human life. At length he sat down on a fallen log, and rested.

He sat long, thinking and dozing. The sun was low in the sky when he arose, and followed some prompting to a ridge not too greatly in the distance. He had come without provision of any kind, and with no fear for his welfare: he would see. The ground seemed soft enough, if he had to sleep there; he took off his shoes and socks, and enjoyed the cool grass.

He walked on toward the ridge, slowly and confidently, his shoes and socks in his hand. He had not eaten for many hours, but he did not seem hungry. Food was not the tremendously important thing that it used to be. He thought of his old esurience, and smiled. Whatever his god was, it was not his belly, it was not his body at all. He still had enough flab to live on for some time without inconvenience, and it would be better to live on it, than to keep stuffing himself. There were no women either, and no androids. They were tiresome,

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and tiring, things. He sighed almost with contentment.

SOON he crossed the ridge, and saw the smiling farmland in the valley not far below. This was where the old food supplies had come from: this had been the life of all but a few, for many centuries. There was a great peace over it all. With a sense as of treading on hallowed ground, he descended steadily, and soon came upon a large and rambling wooden house, unpainted, and comfortable. Really comfortable, in a human way, not in the sham way of the City. There was an elderly woman on the porch, serenely rocking. As he approached, she smiled.

"Welcome, stranger!" she said. "Come on up and rest awhile."

He was glad of the invitation, and he mounted the generous and solid steps with his shoes and socks still in his hand. He sat down and redonned them, under her friendly smile.

"It feels good, doesn't it?" she asserted. "The real earth, under real feet. Maybe you read the poet Hopkins before you got out. I did, right at the last. One poem has always stuck with me, and especially this one line of it:

Neither can feet feel, being shod.

I wanted to feel things; I was tired of being shod, and insulated, and deadened. I was just a young girl, then. I felt charged with the grandeur of God, as Hopkins put it, and I had to get out. I've seen a lot of God's grandeur, and a lot of His blessing, through a long life. It's been good, here in the real world.

"But it's no use chattering", she continued. "That doesn't really express or communicate anything. Nature has got a bigger and better voice than any of us, and the best thing to do is just to listen for it. I hope you'll stay with us awhile. The longer the better. We like to help people who've just escaped. But I still talk too much. Supper'll be ready pretty soon, and I have to go tend to it for a few minutes. Just you sit there and be calm: listen for the still voices."

He was glad to do so, and gladder still to see the men of the family returning from the fields. There were three of them, tall and strong, real human beings, healthy and alive, and little marked by unprofitable care. They had a faith, it seemed, a communion, a divine assurance, more or less fulfilled.

THE older man, the father, welcomed him again, and they were soon seated at the supper table. He noticed that the men ate heartily, and had yet not an ounce of excess flesh. He rued his

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own bulk, and ate but sparingly, only out of politeness. But food had never tasted so good before.

The two sons were already approaching middle age, and were still unmarried. This occasioned their mother some concern. But, as she said, they didn't seem to care, and God or nature could take care of these things better than people could. There was no use straining.

"And there aren't so many young women around", she mused. "There aren't many people. Whatever love-making there may be, there's very little breeding. It's like the City, in that respect. It seems this just isn't a very good world these days, comparatively speaking, and people are being held back till it gets better. There seems to be a sort of a cloud over everything. I don't know. Anyway, we're contented. At least we have our minds and hearts, and our patience."

He stayed a week, a month: into the natural influences he vigorously and gratefully plunged. He helped with the farm work, and grew lean and hard, and mentally as well as physically strong. He stayed on, through the winter.

Then, with the spring, his own fertile ground began to burst and ache, and he was no longer satisfied. He was not nature itself, to endure unmoved the countless cycles of diversified sameness; he was rather a flower that faded with a season, a leaf that would soon fall. He was like a single wave of the vast ocean, and like that wave he must forever be moving on, questioning.

AND so he left the farm very early one morning, and walked north, as he could tell by the stars. They would not be surprised, and it was better this way, without farewells. They would know that, for him, they had served their purpose, and would be glad. And so he walked north, before sunrise. For this direction he was conscious of no particular reason; but he felt it to be as good as any other.

He passed a farm or two, skirting them carefully, and breakfasted on the sunrise alone. It was so beautiful, thus breaking, rose and golden, over the hills. He remembered the last poet that he had read, before his deliverance: the great Sidney Lanier. "The Georgia gold mine", he thought facetiously; and was at once sorry, for his shallowness. No more would successive suns blaze upon the soft southern beauty. The warm blue Atlantic waves rolled over the home of this poet-prophet; whose promise, he fervently hoped, was not yet drowned. He also would be Lit with the Sun. He stretched out his arms to the streaming

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gold, and then walked on vigorously, with a new purpose not yet defined.

HE was getting into ruggeder country, and the going was more difficult. But yet he felt no inclination to break his fast, or to slacken his pace. The air was fresh, and good. He climbed around the spur of a hill, and found himself entering a wild valley, with no sign of human habitation. There was a small stream close by, rippling down from the solitudes. He went to it, and knelt to drink.

As he arose, two ropes descended upon him, from opposite sides, and his arms were firmly pinioned. He looked around, and saw two bearded young men, of not unprepossessing aspect. Each wore tight-fitting clothing and a peaked hat with a long feather, and was armed with knife and sword. One of them motioned into the valley.

"Come on, thou varlet!" he said.

They proceeded, and were soon immersed in the rippling and jutting hills.

Near the head of the valley, and up a hollow to the side, they came to an expansive and well populated clearing. Many men, bearded and heavily armed, were lounging about, dressed fancifully, but for action. There were women also, sturdy and for the most part quite attractive. He found himself speculating briefly on the fierce joy of their dalliance in these invigorating wilds. Then his attention was abruptly drawn ahead, and he was forced to his knees before one who was obviously the leader.

He was in his middle years, and bore a long flaxen beard and leonine mane of hair; his eyes were large, and of a piercing but softly reassuring green. He sat, still and lordly, and surveyed his captive.

At length: "Arise!"

He obeyed, and stood calmly.

The leader continued, "Thou art doubtless but lately from the City, of abhorred name. Thou art but little acquainted with the usages of life. Do not speak! I know 'tis true."

HE paused for a while, then went on with ruminative authority.

"Know that thou hast come into the hands of the Knights of Eld", he said. "As our name implies, and indeed our visible delimitations proclaim, we are no cut-throats, or vulgar brawlers. Thou art safe here.

"But thou art not one of us. Though thou art healthy and strong, and might well prove a formidable adversary, thou takest no delight in combat. Do I speak sooth? Proclaim!"

He proclaimed that it was

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sooth indeed; with the silent reservation that, if the combat were sufficiently noble, and profound, and really, fundamentally necessary—but his thoughts were cut short.

"Then thou hast no place here, unless perchance thou comest for succour, or for sanctuary."

His answer being negative, the leader continued:

"Know that our life is combat. There be many bands, against whom we strive. We have made good escape from the emasculate life of yon City, and we have vowed not to let the spirit of gentle manhood perish. The elements strive together, and yet the strife is co-operative: and so should it be with men.

"I like thee," he continued, with a smile. "Say if thou wilt stay with us, and learn our ways. There is much that we can rede thee, and the benefit will be mutual, and I trust great."

He was briefly tempted, but still, clearly and promptly, he declined. The leader frowned slightly, and was silent. Then the imperious tones rang out:

"Thou art strong! And thou shalt be stronger, if ought of ours can aid to the achievement of this result, so much to be desired.

"Then hearken well. Thy food shall be taken from thee."

His knapsack was ripped rudely from his back.

"Thou shalt wander without guide, and no one of us shall take, in any case, further heed of thee. Go with our respect. And may it be that thou fallest not into the hands of those ruder and less magnanimous, like as the Snakes, perdie, or the Mountain Lions. Thou hast been honorably received, and thou art warned. Begone!"

HE left with as much alacrity as he thought became him, and continued on his way. For the remainder of the day he wandered, without attempting to fix a course, or to avoid anything that might come to him. He was lost in thought, with a great sense of well-being that he felt that nothing could overcome.

As the shadows of evening began to lengthen, and the first stars to shine, he found himself ascending the side of a small but respectably rugged mountain. By the time of total darkness, he had reached the top, and seated himself beneath a redwood tree. He began to feel hungry, but not faint, and with a slight effort of his will the hunger passed away. He sank into a revery, he sat still and thought and contemplated through the long night hours. The cool dews came upon him, and the light winds were whispering in the pale first light, and he was undisturbed.

He remained on the mountain

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for three days, eating nothing, and not thinking of food. He felt the opposing forces of life within, through and around him. The harmonious, continually pulsing tension of existence became in a manner clear to him, its great necessity indubitable. He knew that the battle of opposites, the co-operative strife of elements, abilities, tendencies, must be fought within himself; he foresaw no gain from the struggle's objectification, or its transferral to his associations with others. He would have peaceful, profoundly and highly aspiring, adequate companions, or he would remain alone.

During the fourth night, just before the dawn, he saw a shimmering light over a higher crest in the distance. For an instant it seemed to become a finger, pointing; and then it faded. He arose, light but unfaint from fasting, and set out for the indicated mountain. He encountered no other person along the way.

IT was in the late afternoon that he arrived. It was a large and beautiful valley, into which he slowly descended. It was thickly populated, and filled with a seething, a tremendous activity. Waves of immense, ardent energy enveloped him, compound of great joy and great despair; heart-ravishing music, barely audible, came to him, spasmodically, on the faint breezes. And the weariness and the weakness came to him also, strongly, the exhaustion of his great efforts of the past several days. He lost consciousness, and sank in a seemingly almost boneless heap to the side of the mountain.

He awoke the following morning in a small hut, secluded, in the shade of a large tree and beside a stream. A spare old man, with a slight beard and twinkling eyes, nodded to him.

"Smells good, does it?" he asked.

It smelled very good, and it looked better when the old man brought him an ample breakfast, well prepared. He ate slowly, savoring each mouthful.

"If you don't know where you are," said the old man, "this is a community of artists. We don't always get along very well together," he smiled, "but usually we're minding our own business anyway; and it's good to exchange ideas and insights now and then, and see each other's work. And we co-operate too, especially on the stage productions, like Noh plays, or Wagner, or something contemporary. I can introduce you to a young man who has written some very powerful and apt music for the Aeschylean choruses."

"I'm a poet myself," he continued, "and a dramatist now and then. I'm pretty modest and

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easy-going, compared to most of the people here, but I have my moments, and I've done some pretty good things in my life. I'll probably show you some later on. It's a good thing for you I'm in a silent period just now: if the old touch had been on my lyre, I'd never have noticed you; or if I had, I'd not have attended to you. But come on, you look healthy enough: let me show you around."

He arose to dress, and the old man looked him over with frank admiration.

"You're a fine figure," he said. "And the beard does you justice: or you do justice to the beard. You're like one of the old Biblical patriarchs. Or like my idea of them, anyway; which may be far enough from the truth."

They left the hut, and walked beside the stream into the main valley.

THEY passed an occasional distracted figure, who paid them no heed. Painters were numerous: one of them, burly and covered with paint, had ostentatiously affixed his canvas to a rock wall, and was facing away from all the beauties of the scenery: with furious strokes he was nearing the completion of his vivid abstraction. One sat cross-legged, quite self-contained, and with a few strokes of the brush, black on white, achieved a bird that seemed almost ready to fly from the paper. Another was painting a meltingly beautiful portrait of his mistress, with flowers in her hair.

"When we get back, I'll show you a real picture," the old poet said. "It's called Vasuki. He's the king of the snakes, according to the Hindus. I don't know much about the man who did it, except that he's got the most wonderful eyes I ever saw. I tried to do him justice in a sonnet once, but I failed. He just appeared one day, and then disappeared one day, and that's all anyone seems to know. Two of our best young painters went out to look for him over a year ago, and they haven't returned."

There were musical concerts, operas and plays. There were potters at their wheels, and sculptors with their chisels and their clay. Every art seemed represented.

"In that hut over there," said the poet, "lives one of the greatest musical geniuses the world has ever known. Better even than Beethoven, I think. Maybe you'll have a chance to meet him, if he turns sociable while you're here. I trust you'll be here for a long time. Maybe you'll stay for good? You seem to have the mark in your forehead."

He stayed for several months. He luxuriated in the splendor

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and the beauty of this dedicated life. Great artistry of sound and word, color and form, filled him: but never to overflowing, and never, fully, to satisfaction. He grew weary of the continual reaching out, the perpetual feeding upon dreams. He shared the raptures and the torments of the artists, he felt powerfully and saw deeply, more than ever before: but something was lacking. The occasional flashes of insight were not enough, and the labor, the aspiration, was heart-breaking. What he sought was still beyond, beyond art itself, beyond all possible creation. And yet, it must be attainable.

HE aspired to poetry, he tried to give a voice to his aspiration and his need. But it was not in him. And what if it had been? Why should he write verses to complain that he was not Lit with the Sun? He thought briefly of the Twentieth Century poetry that he had read, the poetry of the Dark Ages, and shuddered at the thought of adding to that store. He would never attempt expression again, until he knew something to express. But when the time came, perhaps it would flow from him in such a golden stream as he remembered from the great masters. Perhaps the poet had not read too mistakenly the sign in his forehead.

He noticed that some of the artists, and those he considered the profoundest and the surest, were not permanent residents here. They came and went, with a light as of far peaks in their eyes. Like the painter of Vasuki, which was truly a marvelous picture, instinct with a spirit that made most other productions seem like mere daubs of paint. He felt that that man knew something, and that he did not learn it here, that he did not learn it as a painter at all. There must be other places, or another place, in which art and the artists were mature. He had had enough of this unquiet, the greatest ecstasies of which obviously fell below the peace and the assurance that called to him. He was weary of this perpetual straining with materials and methods inadequate to the task.

And so, reluctantly, he left the artists, and continued his pilgrimage. As he departed, a symphony orchestra was performing Mozart's Requiem, and this perfect artistry, serene and soaring, dedicated to the very Source, and, it seemed, instinct with something of its light, comprised a fitting and a reassuring farewell.

As the dying strains played upon him, he was filled again with the ravishing verses of Sidney Lanier. Out of the high beauty, these words mingled clearly with his consciousness:

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O long ago the billow-flow of sense
Aroused by passion's windy vehemence
Upbore me out of depths to heights intense,
But not to thee, Nirvana.

It was so true, and so much beyond him! The meaning was never clear, and yet, against it, all else was a deeper darkness. But it called him, and that was sufficient. He must continue, patiently, on the way.

THE walk was pleasant, and the evergreens were soughing gently, as he passed. Midway in the afternoon he sat down by a convenient spring, and ate quickly a light meal. As he was resting, a man came through the trees before him: balding and rather stout, and apparently approaching the end of middle age. He did not know whether he cared to talk with this man. But he had little choice, for he hailed him with a sort of good-natured camaraderie, and came and sat beside him.

"You may consider me a philosopher," the man announced; "that is, in the fine old sense, a lover of wisdom. I don't think that will frighten you away," he chuckled. "I think I can see that you agree with Socrates: that you consider an unexamined life to be a life that is not worth living. Is this correct?"

He replied that it was, and that he was a seeker of wisdom, and hoped one day to prove to be a lover of it—after he had found it.

The philospher smiled, and continued, "Perhaps it is best to be a lover of the search; perhaps, indeed, the search itself is the greatest wisdom. This used to be considered a platitude," he laughed, "when education was more wide-spread in the world. But I have never found anything bright and brand new that matches it. I do not want to be one of those who 'give to dust that is a little gilt more laud than gilt o'erdusted'. How about you?"

He smiled agreement. He was beginning somewhat to like this man: but still he could not respect him, either as an embodiment of wisdom or as a seeker of it. His mind seemed only clever, and rather lazy and complacent with its cleverness: it seemed quite incapable of any really deep probing, or high flight. This was not his idea of a philosopher.

The object of this scrutiny seemed somewhat to sense its import, and to shrug it off.

"I could tell it at a glance," he said. "You're one of the most intelligent men I've ever seen escape from that monstrosity of a City. Let me congratulate you! It's a terrible thing to live like that.

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"One immense mechanized mass! One big idiot's delight, full of nothing but idiots, or morons at best. Everybody "happy": food, shelter and sex all taken care of, and real human contact at a minimum: a true earthly paradise. A paradise for morons, that is, for people who really prefer to live worse than hogs. God bless the dear technologists, who keep it going: they as stupid as the majority, of course, just morons with a little mechanical know-how, as the phrase was. And bless whatever powers there are, for the library, and the chance to escape!

"I don't know how it came about, but there's something behind it. Just before the poor little fools could blow themselves up, the Disasters hit them: and while they were still traumatized, this system began to take care of them. It's a fine thing, I guess, for those that aren't capable of a life worth living. And for those that are, too: it seems to take hold of them at just the right time. It seems that it gives everyone just what he is best fitted for, and then lets him go.

IT never really let go of me—or got rid of me. I alternate, from city to country: read myself to a standstill, and then travel awhile. It's always pleasant, up here. It's like the coast: the seasons don't change anymore. That is, there aren't any seasons—just hints of them. But maybe you know that by now. Ah—yes. I guessed as much. You look like a man that has been out long enough to—well, to look like a man.

"I wonder how it will end? The birth-rate's way down, and seems to continue decreasing, even in the country. Maybe the race is gradually dying out: evolution getting rid of an unfit species. But I wouldn't expect it to be so gentle about it.

"The more I think about it, the better I see what an infinite amount I've got to learn. Another platitude: Newton picking up pebbles on the sea-shore. Maybe the craze for sheer novelty is one of the things that made this mess. I don't know. But I think that there is such a thing as truth, and that it doesn't adapt itself to conditions: conditions have to adapt themselves to it. Do you agree? Yes, I thought so. I think I'll have to be heading back to the library in a few days. I've seen enough this trek.

"There seems to be a guardian angel, somehow, if you believe in that. The explanation's probably a purely natural one. But people come out and live as they like to, with no hindrance, and they prosper. They do a little simple farming, and always have bumper crops. The weather and the wild animals never hurt them,

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and they never hurt each other. The ones that like to fight do it, but only with swords and knives, and nobody ever seems to get killed. All the literature and art of the world is preserved, for those that want it: as many copies as demanded. Sometimes I bring copies of books with me. It helps, to read them out here. Nature's a lot vaster and more wonderful than we know.

"Everything seems to be taken care of. Nobody lives in want or fear anymore. Except," he smiled ruefully, "want of understanding, and fear of death. But we can take things philosophically, to use an old popular expression."

The philosopher paused awhile, thinking, observing his perplexing companion. He could not make him out. Presently he returned to his long-standing provisional solution for all problems.

"Well, why don't you come back to the library with me? Tramping around out here is all right for a while, it relaxes you and keeps you in touch with things; but meanwhile, time flies. Shall we go?"

"I think not," the bearded patriarch replied. "The usefulness of books is all but exhausted for me. And even the greatest and fullest truth, set down in a book, I think must be inadequate. It's not an intellectual thing I seek."

THE philosopher smiled tolerantly.

"You have found that the physical is deadly," he replied. "And you do not appear to be a man who enjoys emotional drunkenness. What is it you want?"

"Perhaps if I knew, I would have it. I suppose it might be called the spiritual, if there is a word for it. But I know that it is calling me. If you care to come with me, perhaps I can begin to explain."

The philosopher almost laughed outright.

"No thank you", he said. "I do not care to take refuge in any vague mysticism. What I know I want really to know, intelligibly and clearly. I am no dreamer."

"Are they irresponsible dreamers, who are behind these historically unparalleled phenomena? Surely there must be someone there. You have seemed to think so yourself."

The philosopher smiled wryly, a little sheepishly.

"Sages in the mountains, eh? Yes, I'll admit having sought them. But they do not seem to want me to find them, and I am going back to the library to follow some leads that I have thought up for myself.

"I do not care to let my mind abdicate its high position," he concluded, with a slight sneer.

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"Goodbye, then. I wish you well."

"And so do I wish you," rejoined the philosopher, with an attempt at mocking irony, as he arose. "Goodbye, my friend."

He began briskly down the path, stopped, and called back, "I hear that there is an island rising, in the Pacific: maybe you can find some wise mermaids out there!"

He laughed maliciously, and strode quickly out of sight.

AND so the abused budding mystic was left alone, as he desired it.

"Goethe was right," he thought to himself; "men are all too predominantly wont to scorn what they do not understand. Goethe himself illustrated the tendency very well.

"There are so many things that cannot be understood by the ordinary intellectual-emotional-sensible mind, no matter how clever it may be, or how brilliant and vigorous, and broad and deep and strong. It lacks too much: it is not self-existent, and self-sustaining. And the things that it cannot understand are the only things of real, undying importance.

"May I soon find my teacher," he continued, "and be properly trained."

He stood up, restlessly. His last day among the artists was tumbling piecemeal upon him. Was it Shakespeare that the theatrical group had been performing? Yes, King Lear! Such magnificent art, and so futile. He paced about sadly, trying to remember a certain line—yes, this was it:

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as
their coming hither;
Ripeness is all.

And that's true, too, he sighed with old Gloucester. And surely he was ripe now, if he was ever going to be. He was balanced in the midst of his various tendencies, and one-pointed for a great drive, a penetration to the depths. He would know himself truly, as infinitely more than that which comes and goes, and shines but briefly in the darkness.

He stood listening, and gazing into the distance. Yes! The call was clear now, and there would be no further stopping along the way. He strode out strongly, and cut due east, heading for the really high mountains, and the farther shore.

THE END

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the Piebald Hippogriff

By KAREN ANDERSON

Because this is a masculine world, the author of this fairytale is usually identified as the wife of Poul Anderson. But a few more incisive cameos of fantasy such as this, and Mr. Anderson may come to be identified as Karen's husband.

THE EDGE of the world is fenced off stoutly enough, but the fence isn't made that will stop a boy. Johnny tossed his pack and coil of rope over it and started climbing. The top three strands were barbed wire. He caught his shirt as he went over, and had to stop for a moment to ease himself off. Then he dropped lightly to the grass on the other side.

The pack had landed in a clump of white clover. A cloud of disturbed bees hung above, and he snatched it away quickly lest they should notice the honeycomb inside.

For a minute he stood still, looking out over the edge. This was different from looking through the fence, and when he moved it was slowly. He eased himself to the ground where a corner of rock rose clear of the thick larkspur and lay on his belly, the stone hard and cool under his chin, and looked down.

The granite cliff curved away out of sight, and he couldn't see if it had a foot. He saw only endless blue, beyond, below, and on both sides. Clouds passed slowly.

Directly beneath him there was a ledge covered with long grass where clusters of stars bloomed on tall, slender stalks.

He uncoiled his rope and found a stout beech tree not too close to the edge. Doubling the rope

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around the bole, he tied one end around his waist, slung the pack on his back, and belayed himself down the cliff. Pebbles clattered, saxifrage brushed his arms and tickled his ears; once he groped for a hold with his face in a patch of rustling ferns.

The climb was hard, but not too much. Less than half an hour later he was stretched out on the grass with stars nodding about him. They had a sharp, gingery smell. He lay in the cool shadow of the world's edge for a while, eating apples and honeycomb from his pack. When he was finished he licked the honey off his fingers and threw the apple cores over, watching them fall into the blue.

Little islands floated along, rocking gently in air eddies. Sunlight flashed on glossy leaves of bushes growing there. When an island drifted into the shadow of the cliff, the blossoming stars shone out. Beyond the shadows, deep in the light-filled gulf, he saw the hippogriffs at play.

THERE were dozens of them, frisking and cavorting in the air. He gazed at them full of wonder. They pretended to fight, stooped at one another, soared off in long spirals to stoop and soar and stoop again. One flashed by him, a golden palomino that shone like polished wood. The wind whistled in its wings.

Away to the left, the cliff fell back in a wide crescent, and nearly opposite him a river tumbled over the edge. A pool on a ledge beneath caught most of the water, and there were hippogriffs drinking. One side of the broad pool was notched. The overflow fell sheer in a white plume blown sideways by the wind.

As the sun grew hotter, the hippogriffs began to settle and browse on the islands that floated past. Not far below, he noticed, a dozen or so stood drowsily on an island that was floating through the cliff's shadow toward his ledge. It would pass directly below him.

With a sudden resolution, Johnny jerked his rope down from the tree above and tied the end to a projecting knob on the cliff. Slinging on his pack again, he slid over the edge and down the rope.

The island was already passing. The end of the rope trailed through the grass. He slithered down and cut a piece off his line.

It was barely long enough after he had tied a noose in the end. He looked around at the hippogriffs. They had shied away when he dropped onto the island, but now they stood still, watching him warily.

Johnny started to take an apple out of his pack, then changed his mind and took a piece of honeycomb. He broke off one cor-

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ner and tossed it toward them. They fluttered their wings and backed off a few steps, then stood still again.

Johnny sat down to wait. They were mostly chestnuts and blacks, and some had white stockings. One was piebald. That was the one which, after a while, began edging closer to where the honeycomb had fallen. Johnny sat very still.

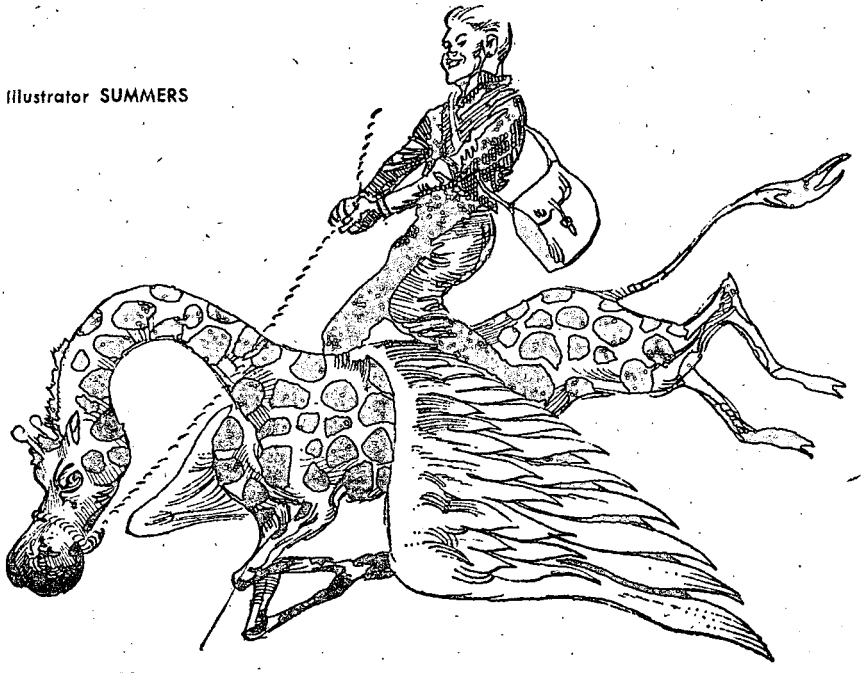
THE piebald sniffed at the honeycomb, then jerked up its head to watch him suspiciously. He didn't move. After a moment it took the honeycomb.

When he threw another bit, the piebald hippogriff wheeled away, but returned almost at once and ate it. Johnny tossed a third piece only a few yards from where he was sitting.

It was bigger than the others, and the hippogriff had to bite it in two. When the hippogriff bent its head to take the rest Johnny was on his feet instantly, swinging his lariat. He dropped the noose over the hippogriff's head. For a moment the animal was too startled to do anything; then Johnny was on its back, clinging tight.

The piebald hippogriff leaped into the air, and Johnny clamped his legs about convulsed muscles.

Illustrator SUMMERS



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Pinions whipped against his knees and wind blasted his eyes. The world tilted; they were rushing downward. His knees pressed the sockets of the enormous wings.

The distant ramparts of the world swung madly, and he seemed to fall upward, away from the sun that suddenly glared under the hippogriff's talons. He forced his knees under the roots of the beating wings and dug heels into prickling hair. A sob caught his breath and he clenched his teeth.

The universe righted itself about him for a moment and he pulled breath into his lungs. Then they plunged again. Wind searched under his shirt. Once he looked down. After that he kept his eyes on the flutter of the feather-mane.

A JOLT sent him sliding backward. He clutched the rope with slippery fingers. The wings missed a beat and the hippogriff shook its head as the rope momentarily checked its breath. It tried to fly straight up, lost way, and fell stiff-winged. The long muscles stretched under him as it arched its back, then bunched when it kicked straight out behind. The violence loosened his knees and he trembled with fatigue, but he wound the rope around his wrists and pressed his forehead against whitened knuckles. Another kick, and another. Johnny dragged at the rope.

The tense wings flailed, caught air, and brought the hippogriff upright again. The rope slackened and he heard huge gasps. Sunlight was hot on him again and a drop of sweat crawled down his temple. It tickled. He loosened one hand to dab at the annoyance. A new twist sent him sliding and he grabbed the rope. The tickle continued until he nearly screamed. He no longer dared let go. Another tickle developed beside the first. He scrubbed his face against the coarse fibre of the rope; the relief was like a world conquered.

Then they glided in a steady spiral that carried them upward with scarcely a feather's motion. When the next plunge came Johnny was ready for it and leaned back until the hippogriff arched its neck, trying to free itself from the pressure on its windpipe. Half choked, it glided again, and Johnny gave it breath.

They landed on one of the little islands. The hippogriff drooped its head and wings, trembling.

He took another piece of honeycomb from his pack and tossed it to the ground where the hippogriff could reach it easily. While it ate he stroked it and talked to it. When he dismounted the hippogriff took honeycomb from his hand. He stroked its neck,

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breathing the sweet warm feathery smell, and laughed aloud when it snuffled the back of his neck.

Tying the rope into a sort of hackamore, he mounted again and rode the hippogriff to the pool below the thunder and cold spray of the waterfall. He took care that it did not drink too much. When he ate some apples for his lunch, the hippogriff ate the cores.

Afterward he rode to one of the drifting islands and let his mount graze. For a while he kept by its side, making much of it. With his fingers, he combed out the soft flowing plumes of its mane, and examined its hoofs and the sickle-like talons of the forelegs. He saw how the smooth feathers on its forequarters became finer and finer until he could scarcely see where the hair on the hindquarters began. Delicate feathers covered its head.

The island glided further and further away from the cliffs, and he watched the waterfall dwindle away to a streak and disappear. After a while he fell asleep.

HE woke with a start, suddenly cold: the setting sun was below his island. The feathery odor was still on his hands. He looked around for the hippogriff and saw it sniffing at his pack.

When it saw him move, it trotted up to him with an expectant air. He threw his arms about the great flat-muscled neck and pressed his face against the warm feathers, with a faint sense of embarassment at feeling tears in his eyes.

"Good old Patch," he said, and got his pack. He shared the last piece of honeycomb with his hippogriff and watched the sun sink still further. The clouds were turning red.

"Let's go see those clouds," Johnny said. He mounted the piebald hippogriff and they flew off, up through the golden air to the sunset clouds. There they stopped and Johnny dismounted on the highest cloud of all, stood there as it turned slowly gray, and looked into dimming depths. When he turned to look at the world, he saw only a wide smudge of darkness spread in the distance.

The cloud they were standing on turned silver. Johnny glanced up and saw the moon, a crescent shore far above.

He ate an apple and gave one to his hippogriff. While he chewed he gazed back at the world. When he finished his apple, he was about to toss the core to the hippogriff, but stopped himself and carefully took out the seeds first. With the seeds in his pocket, he mounted again.

He took a deep breath. "Come on, Patch," he said. "Let's homestead the moon." **THE END**

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Change of Heart

By GEORGE WHITLEY

Illustrator ADKINS

Was the castaway mad from his days of suffering? Or was his weird tale of vengeful monsters of the deep a warning to the world?

ONCE, during the Second World War, I depth charged a whale.

Those of us who served in the fast (but not fast enough) well armed (but not well armed enough) independently sailing merchant ships were apt to suffer from itchy trigger fingers, were liable to shoot first and to ask questions afterwards.

This was such an occasion.

We were homeward bound, running north and east from Bermuda to Liverpool. It was a typical Western Ocean morning —not too cold, for we were in the Gulf Stream and the following half gale was south westerly. There was a penetrating, unpleasant drizzle that threatened to turn to fog at any moment. We had no radar, neither were we equipped with asdic. The possession of either instrument would have made us much happier, especially since we knew that a convoy not very far ahead of us had been badly mauled by a wolf pack. But we were not lacking in armament. We mounted a six inch gun, a twelve pounder, eight Oerlikons, half a dozen light machine guns and our full quota of assorted rocket weapons. In smugly in their racks right aft, three depth charges.

It was my forenoon watch.

I was nervously pacing the bridge, checking the alteration of course every time that the bell of the zig-zag clock in the wheelhouse sounded, making sure that the Oerlikon gunners in the bridge wings were keeping an efficient look-out. With my own binoculars I scanned the heaving greyness ahead and astern, to port and to starboard.

And then I saw it, fine on the

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port bow, a long dark shape that broke surface briefly in a smother of foam, that was crossing our bows and heading out to starboard. It was, perhaps, half a mile distant. The port Oerlikon gunner saw it too; his weapon hammered suddenly and shockingly, sending a stream of twenty millimetre tracer shells hosing out over the waves. I ran for the wheelhouse shouting to the helmsman. "Starboard a little! Starboard five degrees! Steady!" I pushed up the plunger switch that actuated the alarm bells, then twirled the calling handle of the sound-powered telephone.

"Six inch!" I snapped.

"Six inch here, sir."

"Arm and set depth charges!"

The six inch guns crew would have closed up by now; there would be somebody to attend to the telephone while the gunner on watch set the charges. There would be somebody to stand by the docking telegraph, which could be used for warlike purposes as well as for its original function, a means of rapid communication when berthing the ship. I made a mental computation, felt rather than reasoned that at our speed we should be, now, right over the submarine. I was dimly aware that the other officers were on the bridge, that the Old Man was standing at my elbow. He did not interfere, but followed me out to the wing of the bridge, to the telegraph.

I jerked the handle to *Let Go.* The bell jangled as the pointer came round to acknowledge the order.

"Submarine?" asked the Captain tersely.

"Yes, sir. She was right ahead when I picked her up. I tried to ram, but she must have dived."

We stared aft, at the turbulence of our wake. And then there was more than the disturbance created by our racing screws. We saw the surface of the sea boil and break before we felt the hammer blow of the underwater explosion. We saw a geyser of white water—and lifted on it, twisting and turning, the great body. The enormous head, the fluked tail, made recognition instantaneous.

The broken thing fell back into the violently disturbed water, remaining afloat for a few seconds. The sea around it was red with blood.

Then—but it was a long time ago—I felt sorry for that whale.

Now . . .

THE war was over, and then there was the Cold War, and there was the Korean War, and there were the various revolutions and the suppressions of revolutions—but we, in the Merchant Navy, soon forgot all that we had ever learned about guns and gunnery, very soon lost the

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feeling of naked defenselessness that at first afflicted us when we ventured out of port without as much as a light machine gun mounted about the decks. Our status hadn't changed. We were still civilians—but we were no longer civilians expecting to be shot at and equipped with the wherewithal for shooting back.

Time passed, with its passage came the usual promotions until, not so long ago, I found myself Master of one of the Company's smaller and older vessels, outward bound from the U.K. to New Zealand via the Panama Canal.

Frankly, once the initial worries were behind me I was enjoying the voyage. I had no intention of running "a taut ship"—that phrase, in fact, has always rather repelled me. A happy ship is not necessarily an inefficient one; the so called taut ship very often is just that. My officers were capable and no lazier than the generality of certificated personnel. As long as things got done I let them do them in their own way. My attitude, I admit, has rather changed of late. I am apt to be extremely fussy about an efficient look-out. Recently I overheard my disgruntled Third Mate complaining to the Second Mate at the watch relief, "The Old Man's getting worse. He gave me hell because I hadn't seen a blasted porpoise playing about the bows!"

So my not very taut—but quite happy—ship was in mid-Pacific, a little artificial satellite falling down the long orbit between the Gulf of Panama and Auckland. (After all, a Great Circle track could be classed as a surface orbit.) There was the sky, usually cloudless, above us, there was the blue, empty sea all around us. There was the familiar, pleasant ship's routine—the routine that on a long voyage seems to be built around meal times and deck golf times and gin times. There was a well stocked ship's library, supplemented by the books that I had brought with me. There was the novel—*the* novel—that I was going to write some time when I felt strong enough; at the moment, however, I was enjoying the laziness after years of a more or less strenuous life as Chief Officer far too much to be able to drive myself to break out my portable typewriter and supply of paper.

And then, one fine afternoon, I was awakened from my afternoon sleep by the buzzing of the telephone.

I took the instrument from its rest, said drowsily and irritably, "Captain here."

"Second Officer, sir. I've sighted something ahead and a little to starboard. Looks like a raft."

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"I'll be right up," I told him.

I FOUND him on the starboard wing of the bridge, his binoculars focussed on the distant object. I brought my own to bear. It was a raft all right—a roughly constructed affair with a mast from which a tattered rag depended limply. There was a man sprawled at the foot of the mast. I thought that I saw him move. I depressed the lever of the automatic whistle control, heard the deep, organ note go booming out over the gently undulant water. The man heard it too. He tried to stagger to his feet, managed to get to his knees. He clung to the mast with one hand, waved feebly with the other. Then he collapsed.

Meanwhile, my Second Mate had not been idle. I had been faintly conscious of the shrilling of his pocket whistle as he called the stand-by man of the watch. Shortly afterwards I realized that the Chief Officer was standing behind me, waiting for orders, and that the Bo's'n was waiting behind him.

There was no need to give any orders really. It was just a nice, uncomplicated rescue job, with weather conditions more in our favor than otherwise. I could have brought the ship right alongside the raft and sent a man down with a gantline to make fast around the castaway—he would obviously have been unable to climb a pilot ladder. But I wasn't sufficiently sure of my abilities as a ship handler; it would have been a cruel irony to crush or overset the flimsy craft and to kill the man at the very moment of rescue.

So I stopped the ship about a quarter of a mile from the raft and lowered and sent away the motor boat, under the Chief Officer. The Mate handled the boat well, laid it alongside the rough platform and then sent two A.B.s to help the man aboard. They had to lift him, to carry him, to pass him over the gunwales into the lifeboat. One of them reboarded, the other one remained on the raft for a minute or so, searching the small area. He found nothing—I could see the gesture that he made with his empty hands—and then rejoined his mates.

I went down to the boat deck when the lifeboat returned. I looked down into the boat as it was rehoisted. The castaway looked more dead than alive. He was bearded, shaggy, emaciated, deeply sunburned. He was naked but for a ragged pair of shorts. A jolt as the gunwale of the boat fouled a plate edge seemed to stir him into consciousness. He started up, looked around wildly. The Mate put out a hand to restrain him. He seized the Mate's hand in his own two claws,

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hung on to it desperately. The sight could have been ludicrous—but it was somehow frightening.

The boat was brought up to fishplate level and then the winch was stopped. The castaway was lifted and passed inboard—"Light as a bleedin' fevver, 'e is," I heard one of the A.B.s say—and then strapped into the waiting stretcher. The glaring eyes in the dark brown face—the face that was little more than dry skin stretched over a skull—found mine. "Captain?" he croaked.

"Yes. I am the Captain."

"Must . . . Must tell you. Must warn . "

"In a little while," I told him.

"Now," he whispered demandingly. *"Now."*

BUT I had other things to attend to. I ignored his pleadings, went back to the bridge where I waited until the boat had been swung inboard and secured. I gave the orders that put an end to the interruption to our voyage. Then, with the ship once again on her course and with the engines turning at full speed, I left the bridge to the officer of the watch and went down to the hospital.

We carried no doctor that trip, but it didn't really matter. Given the Medical Guide and a well stocked medicine chest the average ship's officer can manage as well as the average G.P.—rather better, perhaps, as he has a deeper understanding of the psychology of merchant seamen.

The Mate, I found, was coping quite well. He had put the man into one of the hospital bunks. He had smeared the cracked lips and the cracked skin of the upper face and body with petroleum jelly. He was holding a cup of hot, sweet tea from which the castaway, propped up with pillows, was sipping slowly. He was saying soothingly, "You can tell your story later. You must get your strength back first . . ."

The man jerked his head violently so that the tea slopped over the Mate's hand and over the white bed linen. He cried—and already his voice was stronger, was less of a croak—"But this is important. You must be warned. You have radio. You must warn the world!"

Pirates? I wondered. *Russian submarines on the prowl? Little green men from flying saucers?*

"Let him talk," I said.

He turned to stare at me. "Yes, Captain. I'll talk. And you will listen. You must listen. You must. *You must!"* His voice had risen to a scream.

"Yes," I said soothingly. "I'll listen."

I listened—and this is what I heard.

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THERE were six of us (he said). There were six of us, and we were bumming around the islands, picking up the odd parcel of cargo, the occasional deck passenger. She had been a smallish patrol craft during the war, and then she'd been converted into a fishing boat, with refrigeration, so we could always catch and later sell fish when there was nothing else offering. Jimmy Larsen—he'd been in the Navy—was our navigator, and Pete Russo was the engineer, and Bill and Clarry and Des and myself just lent a hand as and when required. It was a good enough life while it lasted.

But it didn't last.

We were making a passage from . . . from . . .

Sorry, I wasn't the navigator, and I could never remember the names of those islands. But it was a French island, a small one, and we had this cargo of government stores. And it doesn't matter much where we were taking it to, because we never got there.

It was a fine morning when it happened. I was at the wheel. Bill and Clarry were sunbaking on the foredeck, Pete was in the engineroom, Des and Jimmy were sleeping. I was damn' nearly asleep myself, but I was keeping the lubber's line steady enough on the course.

I heard Bill call out, saw him get to his feet. He was pointing, out to starboard. Clarry got up to look. I looked too. I thought at first that the broken water was indication of a reef—then saw that it was a school of dolphins. Nothing unusual, perhaps—but this was unusual. There was a whale among them. A big fellow. A sperm whale, by the looks of him.

They were heading our way. I didn't worry, neither did the others. Porpoises are friendly brutes. They like to show off their superior turn of speed, like to make rings around even fast ships. And the poor little *Sue Darling* wasn't a fast ship. She may have been, when the Navy had her, but she wasn't now.

She was Jimmy's girl friend in Honolulu, Sue Darling. Yes, that was her name. You'd better tell her, Captain. But break it gently to her if you can. She was a good kid, and she thought the world of Jimmy.

They were heading our way—and then, as I had known they would, they altered course before they hit us, half of them passing astern, the others passing ahead. But the whale didn't alter course. He was a big brute. There must have been damn' nearly a hundred tons of him, and he was doing a good twelve knots.

He hit us at speed, right amidships, and that was the end of *Sue Darling*. She was a wood-

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en ship, and she was old, and she just fell to pieces at the impact. The diesels must have gone straight down when the bottom fell out of her, taking Pete Russo with them. We never saw anything of him. I did glimpse Jimmy briefly before he went down. He must have been dead—there was a lot of blood. Something must have hit him, must have smashed his skull in. Des got out of it all right—not that it did him much good in the end. I shall never forget the absurd look of amazement on his face as he woke up to find himself struggling in the water.

THE porpoises were all around us, buffeting us with their sleek bodies, making odd grunting noises. At first I thought that they were attacking us. But they weren't. They were herding us to where the dinghy that had been lashed to the ship's cabin top was floating, bottom up. And it seemed—I thought at the time that I was going mad—that those grunting noises were some sort of speech, that they were talking among themselves and trying to tell us something.

They helped us to right the dinghy. Yes, Captain, they helped us. And one of them surfaced under me and gave me a boost as I was trying to struggle over the gunwale. I should have been grateful to the brute, but I wasn't. I was frightened. It was . . . uncanny.

Anyhow, there the four of us were—Bill, Clarry, Des and myself. The four non-specialists. We were seamen by courtesy only. We were no more than penpushers who had heard the call of the islands, who had found a nomadic life in a rickety little island tramp preferable to an existence chained to an office desk. But we were none of us much good at doing things—which, perhaps, was just as well. But the porpoises weren't to know that.

There were no oars in the dinghy. They had fallen out, and were drifting with the wreckage of the ship. We argued among ourselves about it, tried to decide which one of us was going to swim from the boat to bring them back. But none of us was keen on going over the side. That water was too . . . too crowded. And for the same reason we weren't keen on using our hands as paddles until we recovered the oars. Suddenly we had become very frightened of the sea and of everything that moved within it.

The porpoises settled the argument. They surrounded the boat—to port, to starboard, astern. I was afraid that the pressure of their bodies would push in the planking. They got under way—and we got under way with

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them. I don't know what speed we were making—but it was a respectable one. We were soaked by the water slopping in over the bows and the low sides.

We traveled—towed or pushed by the porpoises—all that day, and all of the following night. We travelled all the next day as well, and the day after that. When, in the late afternoon, we saw the island, a blue smudge on the far horizon, we were in a sorry state. It was Clarry who had kept us going. He had read a lot. He was one of those people who reads anything and everything. It was Clarry who told us to keep our bodies immersed in the sea water—there was plenty of that—so that our skins could absorb the moisture. It was Clarry who told us to tear buttons from the shorts that were all that we had in the way of clothing, and to suck them. It was Clarry who told us about the old legends concerning porpoises or dolphins that have saved the lives of shipwrecked sailors.

But he never convinced me that those porpoises were really friendly.

IT was just on sunset that our dinghy grounded on the sandy beach of the island. It wasn't much of an island—although we were glad enough to tumble out of the boat and to stagger up on to the dry land. It wasn't much of an island, as we were to discover when we got around to exploring it the next day. There were a few palm trees—but either they weren't coconut palms or coconuts weren't in season. There was some low scrub. And that was all.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We staggered up the beach, as I have said, and then, after we had got some of our strength back, we began to feel thirsty. But there wasn't any water—we never found any then, neither did we find any later. Clarry suggested that we dig—which we did, with our bare hands. The trickle of moisture that oozed through into the holes—after a long, long time—was salt. Clarry said that we should pull the boat well up on to the beach so that it would not drift away during the night; it seemed that we should not be able to stay on the island, there was nothing there to support life.

But the boat was gone. There was no sign of it.

And then we saw a commotion out to sea. It was light enough—the full moon had risen as the sun had set—and we could see the flurry of white water, the leaping bodies. It was the porpoises back again—and this time they were driving before them a shoal of mullet. They chased those fish right up on to the sand where they flopped—ener-

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getically at first, then more and more feebly.

"Water," said Clarry.

"Food," croaked Des. "Food—if you don't mind eating raw fish. But where is the water?"

"In the fish," said Clarry. "In the flesh of the fish. You always have to take salt with fried fish, don't you? The body fluids are practically pure fresh water."

These body fluids were fresh water all right—but far from pure, very far from pure. Raw fish is so very much fishier than cooked fish. There was food, and there was water, and we got the revolting mess down somehow, tearing the still living bodies to pieces with our fingers and teeth, spitting out scale and bone and . . . and other things.

And that was the first night on the island.

We slept well enough. Come to that, we slept surprisingly well. When we woke up at sunrise we made our exploration of the tiny island, found nothing that would raise our hopes. But we were alive, and that was something. And then Clarry set us to building a pile of brush for a signal fire. How we were going to light it—in the unlikely event of our sighting a passing ship or aircraft—nobody was quite sure, not even Clarry. It's one thing reading about making fire by friction—getting the necessary technique isn't so easy.

THE porpoises came back at mid-morning—about forty of them. There was great splashing and confusion as they pushed something up on to the sand. We ran down to examine it. It was a tangled mass of wreckage—steel wreckage. What paint that remained on it was grey. It may have come from a surface ship, it may have come from a submarine. None of us knew enough about ships to be able to hazard a guess.

Another school of the brutes drove in from the horizon. They were pushing more wreckage—but floating wreckage this time. There were shattered timbers—some of them old and barnacle encrusted, some of them comparatively new. There were planks that could have come from the *Sue Darling*, from her dinghy. Led by Clarry we waded into the shallows, dragged the wood well inshore. It seemed that the sea beasts had presented us to the wherewithal to construct a raft. (But why had they taken and broken up the dinghy?)

Then all but one of the porpoises retired to seaward. He cruised up and down in the shallow water, pointing with his beak first of all at the steel wreckage, then at the timber. He grunted and he whistled. It seemed that there was a note of exasperation in the sounds that he was making.

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Eventually he dived at last.

"He wanted something," said Bill. "He wanted to tell us something. What did he want to tell us?"

"But he's only an animal," objected Des.

"What are we?" asked Clarry. He said softly, "The history of Man is the history of the tool-making, fire-using animal . . . What must it be like to be intelligent—as intelligent as Man, perhaps—but to have no hands, no tools, no fire?"

"Rubbish," said Des. "Those things aren't intelligent."

"Their brains are as heavy as ours, and as convoluted. Nobody is sure just how intelligent they are. They are at least as intelligent as dogs. *At least* . . ." He stared out to sea, looked worried. "But there could have been changes, mutations. Radiation is supposed to be one of the causes of mutation—if not *the* cause—and there must be large volumes of radio-active water in the Pacific after the various Bomb tests. And all the Cetacea—the whales and the porpoises—must be genetically unstable. Think of it—not too long ago, geologically speaking, their ancestors were bearlike mammals, living on dry land. They returned to the sea—and must have been able to adapt themselves to the new conditions—or the old conditions?—rapidly, in a very few generations. And now there's been another mutation, another jump ahead . . ."

"Hogwash," said Des, but his voice failed to carry conviction.

While Clarry talked and we listened the porpoises returned. We became aware that a half dozen of them were pushing something else through the shallows. It was a large slab of slatelike rock. There were scratchings on its smooth surface. At first they made no sense at all as we studied them after we had pulled the slab ashore. Human artists see things differently from each other and such differences are obvious enough in the finished paintings. An essentially alien but intelligent being will see things differently from a man.

And then, quite suddenly, those pictures made sense. There was a fire—depicted by curly lines—about which stood vaguely manlike figures. There were those same manlike figures engaged upon some sort of work, hitting something with hammers. And then there was a porpoise—the shape of that was more easily recognizable—and then there was a swordfish. But it wasn't a swordfish. It was a porpoise and it was wearing a sort of harness from which the sword projected ahead of it.

Clarry—he was quick on the uptake—started to laugh. He

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spluttered, "The damned things want us to turn armorer. They want us to fit them out—for war!"

Well, that was what they wanted.

THEY kept us fed—and I never want to eat fish again!—and as long as they saw us working they seemed to be satisfied. Oh, we never did get around to making fire—although it would have been a pity to have burned the timber that we were supposed to use for firewood. We had other ideas about that timber.

We used stones for tools at first—there was a rocky outcrop at the center of the island—and managed to knock conveniently shaped hunks of iron from the jagged wreckage of the submarine or whatever it was. And with these crude hammers we knocked the nails out of the timbers—and knocked the same nails back in again as we constructed the raft. We were cunning enough to do this inshore, well out of the reach of prying eyes. (At times I thought that the seabirds had become intelligent too, would report what we were doing to our captors.) And those of us who stayed on the beach put up an impression of busyness. Towards the end, however, the leader of the school—I suppose you could call him that—was getting impatient, was cruising up and down snorting indignantly. Clarry tried to tell him that we were handicapped by having no fire; he pointed to the sun, he pointed to the diminished pile of timber, and then he shook his head violently. Whether or not he got the message across I don't know.

And then the raft was finished. We launched it that night. There was no moon, and the sea was quiet, undisturbed by splashings or snortings. We all clambered aboard the flimsy contraption somehow and the current took us out and away. We knew that our attempt at escape was almost certain death—but we were crazy enough to consider death superior to serfdom to lower animals.

But were we so crazy?

And were those animals so very much lower?

Lower or not—they found us.

They found us at noon, when our spirits were at a low ebb, when we were looking back with regret to the scanty shade afforded by those few poor palms, when we would have sold our souls for a trickle of the fishy water, that we had found so revolting, down our throats.

They found us at noon—and I, I must confess, was glad to see them. When they pushed us back to the island I would be a good boy, I decided. I would try to make a fire. I would try to make

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one of the sword and harness affairs that they wanted. I would try to turn swords out in dozen lots.

They found us—and the others found them.

THEY came sweeping in at forty knots or so from the south'ard, great, vicious brutes, in appearance not unlike the creatures milling about our raft but bigger, much bigger, black, with white bellies and with great dorsal fins. They may have been what Clarry called mutants; they may have been killer whales. Whatever they were—they were killers. They drove in like a charge of marine cavalry, heavy cavalry, and as they smashed through the squadrons of our captors the water was reddened with blood. They turned, charged again.

And again.

And then one of them nudged the raft. Des was the first to go, to slide, screaming, into the bloody water. His screams ceased abruptly. Then Bill went as the raft was almost capsized, and then Clarry and I were fighting for the mast, for a firm grip on the shaky pole that could mean salvation. I'm glad about one thing. Clarry was unconscious when he went overboard. I felt like a murderer when I hit him as hard as I did —I am a murderer—but at least he didn't feel those teeth that chipped him in two.

I don't know why they left me. Perhaps they thought that there were only three men on the raft. Perhaps they were so well fed that they just didn't bother me. But, quite suddenly, they were gone—and the sea was empty but for the floating fragments east. (The air wasn't empty; the birds were feeding well.)

And that's all. That's all as far as I'm concerned, Captain. When we get to port I'm leaving this ship, and I'm going as far inland as I can get, and I never want to see the sea again. It's up to you, now. You must get the messages out—for your sake, as well as everybody else's. You aren't safe. Those things—as we found out—can control whales. Think of it—think of a hundred ton whale sent to mash himself in your screws and then, while you're drifting, helpless, a dozen or so of the brutes charging against the plating of your side.

You're not safe.

Nobody's safe.

You must warn . . .

You must . . . .

* * *

HE'S passed out," said the Mate. "He excited himself too much."

I looked at the sleeping man. there was nothing, I hoped,

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wrong with him beyond exhaustion and the effects of prolonged exposure. His breathing seemed natural enough.

"What did *you* make of it?" I asked.

The Mate put his finger to his forehead, made a circling motion. "Round the bend, sir. Round the bend. Probably his raft was chivvied by porpoises. But all this talk of mutants and such—why, it's straight out of science fiction!"

"So are artificial satellites and rockets to the Moon," I told him.

"They're *different*," he said.

"Detail the cadets to stand a watch in the hospital," I ordered. "And arrange for the watch-keeping officers to look in when they come off watch."

I WENT back to my quarters and started to draft a radio message. A warning? No—not yet. I had no desire to expose myself to the ridicule showered upon such master mariners as observe sea serpents and then are unwise enough to report it. "Picked up survivor from island trader *Sue Darling*." That would do. That would have to do for the time being.

But a full report would have to be made.

I was still working on that report after dinner. It had not been continuous work—I had gone down to look at the rescued man at frequent intervals, and each time he had been sleeping. But I was working on it when I heard the weird whistlings and snortings drifting in through my open port.

I went out on to the lower bridge.

It was a brightly moonlit night, and I could see that the sea around us was alive with porpoises, with sleek, leaping forms that matched our seventeen knots with ease. Suddenly I felt afraid, found myself scanning the ocean for the tell-tale spout that would betray the presence of a whale.

There was a shout from aft.

I heard a youthful voice crying, "Stop him! Stop him!"

I ran down the ladder, then to the after end of the boat deck. I saw the castaway standing on the bulwarks, shaking his fists, hurling imprecations at the things in the sea. Then the ship lurched and he overbalanced. He kicked at the ship's side as he fell, so he hit the water well clear of the suction of the screws. It should have been easy enough to pick him up again—especially since the cadet who had been on hospital watch threw him a lifebuoy.

It should have been, but . . .

They say that porpoises will never attack a man in the water. These porpoises could never have heard of the saying. They made

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a quicker and messier job of their victim than a school of starving sharks would have done.

Somebody with both authority and imagination will read my report in time, I hope. Meanwhile, there are far too many small ships going a-missing, far too many little craft, built of wood, of the type that can be disposed of by one charge of a single whale.

And what was it that the castaway had said?

"You aren't safe. Those things —as we found out—can control whales. Think of it—think of a hundred ton whale sent to mash himself in your screws and then while you're drifting, helpless, a dozen or so of the brutes charging against the plating of your sides.

"You're not safe.

"Nobody's safe . . ."

I felt very sorry for the whale that I depth charged all those years ago.

But now . . .

But now I'd feel a lot happier if somebody in authority did something about the situation, if once again I had those horribly lethal ashcans sitting smugly in their racks at the stern.

THE END

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DOUBLE or NOTHING

By JACK SHARKEY

The mind quails before certain contemplations?

The existence of infinity, for instance.

Or finity, for that matter.

Or 50,000 batches of cornflakes dumped from the sky.

I DON'T know why I listen to Artie Lindstrom. Maybe it's because at times (though certainly not—I hope—on as permanent a basis as Artie) I'm as screwy as he is. At least, I keep letting myself get sucked into his plans, every time he's discovered the "invention that will change the world". He discovers it quite a bit; something new every time. And, Artie having a natural mechanical aptitude that would probably rate as point-nine-nine-ad-infinitum on a scale where one-point-oh was perfection, all his inventions work. Except—

Well, take the last thing we worked on. (He usually includes me in his plans because, while he's the better cooker-upper of these gadgets, I've got the knack for building them. Artie can't seem to slip a radio tube into its socket without shattering the glass, twist a screwdriver without gouging pieces out of his thumb, nor even solder an electrical connection without needing skin-grafts for the hole he usually burns in his hand.)

So we're a team, Artie and me. He does the planning, I do the constructing. Like, as I men-

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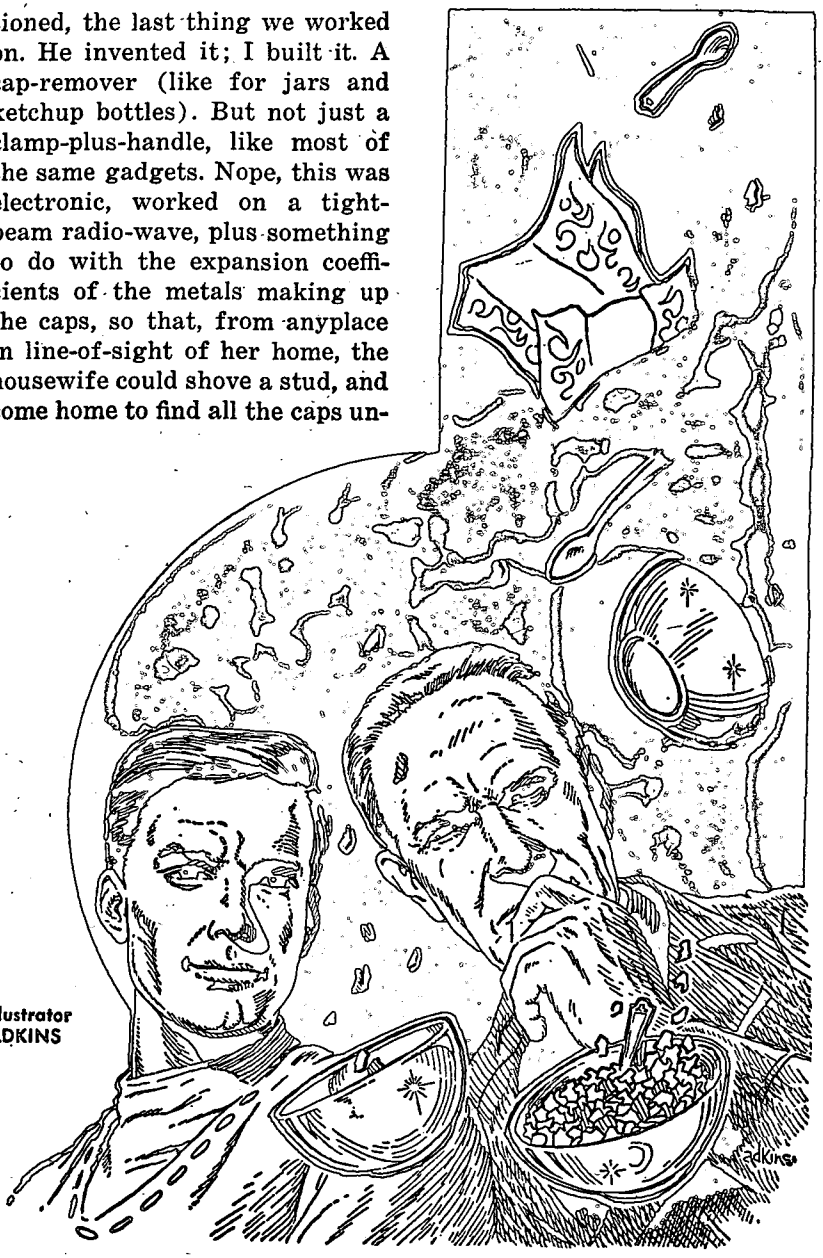
tioned, the last thing we worked on. He invented it; I built it. A cap-remover (like for jars and ketchup bottles). But not just a clamp-plus-handle, like most of the same gadgets. Nope, this was electronic, worked on a tight-beam radio-wave, plus something to do with the expansion coefficients of the metals making up the caps, so that, from anyplace in line-of-sight of her home, the housewife could shove a stud, and come home to find all the caps un-



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screwed on her kitchen shelves, and the contents ready for getting at. It did, I'll admit, have a nice name: The Teletwist.

Except, where's the point in unscrewing caps unless you're physically present to make use of the contents of the jars? I mentioned this to Artie when I was building the thing, but he said, "Wait and see. It'll be a novelty, like hula hoops a couple of decades back. Novelties always catch on."

WELL, he was wrong. When we finally found a manufacturer softheaded enough to mass-produce a few thousand of the gadgets, total sales for the entire country amounted to seventeen. Of course, the price was kind of prohibitive: Thirteen-fifty per Teletwist. Why would a housewife lay that kind of money on the line when she'd already, for a two-buck license, gotten a husband who could be relied upon (well, most of the time) to do the same thing for her?

Not, of course, that we didn't finally make money on the thing. It was just about that time, you'll remember, that the Imperial Martian Fleet decided that the third planet from Sol was getting a bit too powerful, and they started orbiting our planet with ultimatums. And while they were waiting for our answer, our government quietly purchased Artie's patent, made a few little adjustments on his cap-twister, and the *next* thing the Martians knew, all their airlocks were busily unscrewing themselves with nothing outside them except hungry vacuum. It was also the *last* thing the Martians knew.

So Artie's ideas seem to have their uses, all right. Only, for some reason, Artie never thinks of the proper application for his latest newfound principle. That neat little disintegrator pistol carried by the footsoldiers in the Three Day War (with Venus; remember Venus?) was a variation on a cute little battery-powered device of Artie's, of which the original function had been to rid one's house of roaches.

At any rate—at a damned *good* rate, in fact—the government always ended up paying Artie (and me, as his partner-confederate-cohort) an anything-but-modest fee for his patents. We weren't in the millionaire class, yet, but neither were we very far out of it. And we were much better off than any millionaires, since Artie had persuaded the government to let us, in lieu of payment for another patent of his (for his Nixsal; the thing that was supposed to convert sea-water into something drinkable, and did: Gin.), be tax-free for the rest of our lives.

(It was quite a concession for the government to make. But

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then, the government-produced "George Washington Gin" is quite a concession in itself.)

So I guess you could say I keep listening to Artie Lindstrom because of the financial rewards. I must admit they're nice. And it's kind of adventurous, when I'm working on Artie's latest brainstorm, to let myself wonder what—since I generally scrap Artie's prognosis for the gadget's future—the damned thing will *actually* be used for.

Or, at least, it *was* kind of adventurous, until Artie started in on his scheme of three weeks ago: a workable anti-gravity machine. And now, I'm feeling my first tremors of regret that I ever hooked up with the guy. Because—Well, it happened like this:

"IT looks great," I said, lifting my face from the blueprint, and nodding across the workbench at Artie. "But what the hell does it do?"

Artie shoved a shock of dust-colored hair back off his broad, dull pink forehead, and jabbed excitedly with a grimy forefinger at the diagram. "Can't you *tell*, Burt? What does *this* look like!"

My eyes returned to the conglomeration of sketchy cones beneath his flailing finger, and I said, as truthfully as possible, "A pine forest on a lumpy hill."

"Those," he said, his tone hurt as it always was when I inadvertently belittled his draftmanship, "are flywheels."

"Cone-shaped flywheels?" I said. "Why, for pete's sake?"

"Only," he said, with specious casualness, "in order to develop a centrifugal thrust that runs in a *straight line!*"

"A centr—" I said, then sat back from the drawings, blinking. "That's impossible, Artie."

"And why should it be?" he persisted. "Picture an umbrella, with the fabric removed. Now twirl the handle on its axis. What do the ribs do?"

"I suppose they splay out into a circle?"

"Right," he exulted. "And if they *impeded* from splaying out? If, instead of separate ribs, we have a hollow, bottomless cone of metal? Where does the force go?"

I thought it over, then said, with deliberation, "In *all* directions, Artie. One part shoving up-to-the-right, one part up-to-the-left, like that."

"Sure," he said, his face failing to fight a mischievous grin. "And since none of them move, where does the *resultant* force go?"

I shrugged. "Straight up, I guess—" Then my ears tuned in belatedly on what I'd said, and a moment later I squeaked, "Artie! Straight *up!*"

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HE nodded eagerly. "Or, of course, straight east, straight west, or whichever way the ferrule of this here theoretical umbrella was pointed at the time the twirling began. The point is, we can generate pure force in *any* direction. What do you think? Can you build it?"

"It'd be child's play. In fact, Artie, it's *too* damned simple to be believed! What's the hitch? Why hasn't anyone tried it before *now?*"

"Who knows?" he said, his blue eyes dancing. "Maybe no one ever thought of it before. You could sit down and twist a paper clip out of a hunk of soft wire, couldn't you? Easy as pie. But someone had to invent the thing, first. All the great inventions have been simple. Look at the wheel."

"Okay, okay," I said, since I'd been sold on his gadget the moment I pictured that umbrella moving ferruleward like a whirling arrow. "Still, it looks like you're getting something for nothing. A kind of by-your-own-bootstraps maneuver . . ."

"An inventor," said Artie, quoting his favorite self-coined aphorism, "must never think like a scientist!"

"But—" I said, more to stem the tide I expected than to really make a coherent objection.

"An inventor," he went dreamily onward, "is essentially a dreamer; a scientist is an observer. An inventor tries to make a result he wants happen; a scientist tries to tell the inventor that the result cannot be achieved."

"Please, Artie. Don't tell me about the bee again."

But Artie told me about the bumblebee, and how there were still some scientists who insisted, according to the principles of aerodynamics, that it was not constructed properly to enable it to fly. And about how men of this short-sighted ilk were still scoffing at the ancient alchemist's talk of the Philosopher's Stone for transmuting metals, even though transmutation of metals was being done every day in atomic piles. And how he'd theorized that there *was* once a genuine Philosopher's Stone, probably a hunk of pure U-235, that someone had managed to make, which might explain why so many alchemists (lacking, unfortunately, any knowledge of heavy radiations or Geiger counters) sort of died off in their quest for the stone.

IT was nearly lunchtime when he finished his spiel, and I was kicking myself in my short-memoried brain for having let him get onto the subject, when abruptly the joyous glow behind his eyes damped its sparkle a bit.

"There *is* one little hitch—"

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"I thought it looked too easy," I sighed, waiting for the clinker. "Don't tell me it has to be made out of pure Gallium, which has the regrettable tendency to liquify at about thirty degrees centigrade? Or perhaps of the most elusive of its eleven isotopes?"

"No, no, nothing like that," he murmured almost distractedly. "It's the force-per-gram part that's weak."

"Don't tell me," I said unhappily, "that this thing'll only generate enough force to lift itself?"

A feeble ghost of his erstwhile grin rode breifly across his lips. "That's the way it works out on paper," he said.

"Which means," I realized aloud, "that it's commercially useless, because what's the good of an anti-gravity machine that can't lift anything except *itself!* It falls into the class of lifeboats that float up to the gunwales in the water while still *empty.* Fun to watch, but impossible to use. Hell, Artie, if that's the setup, then this thing wouldn't be any more help to a space-aiming government than an aborigine's boomerang; it flies beautifully, but not if the aborigine tries to go *with* it."

"However," he said, a bit more brightly, "I've been wrong on paper before. Remember the bumblebee, Burt! *That* theory still holds up on paper. But the bee still flies."

He had me, there. "So you want I should build it anyhow, just on the off-chance that it *won't* follow the rules of physical logic, and will decide to generate a force above and beyond its own gravitic drag?"

"That's it," he said happily. "And even if it only manages to negate its own weight, we'll have an easier time ironing the bugs out of a model than we would out of a diagram. After all, who'd have figured that beyond *Mach I,* all the lift-surfaces on a plane work in *reverse?*

It wasn't, I had to admit, anything that an inventor could have reasonably theorized at the outset . . . So I locked myself in the lab for a week, and built his gadget, while he spent his time pacing through his fourteen-room mansion across the way from the lab building (the "way" being the flat grassy region on Artie's estate that housed his swimming pool, private heliport, and movie theatre), trying to coin a nifty name for the thing. We both finished in a dead heat.

I UNLOCKED the door of the lab, blinked hard against the sting of warm yellow sunlight after a week of cool blue fluorescents, and just as I wheezed, "Got it," Artie was counterpointing with, "We'll call it The *Uuaa!*" (He made four syllables out of it.)

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"The *Oo*-oo-*ah*-ah?" I glottaled. "In honor of the fiftieth state, or what? I know 'aa' is a type of lava, but what the hell's 'uu', besides the noise a man makes getting into an overheated bath?"

Artie pouted. "'Uuaa' is initials. For 'Up, up, and away!' I thought it was pretty good."

I shook my head. "Why feed free fodder to the telecomics? I can hear them now, doing monologues about people getting beriberi flying from Walla Walla to Pago Pago on their Uuaas . . ."

"So what would *you* call it!" he grunted.

"A bust," I sighed, left-thumbing over my shoulder at the lab. "It sits and twirls and whistles a little, but that's about the size of it, Artie."

He spanieled with his eyes, basset-hounded with his mouth, and orangutaned with his cheeks, then said, with dim hope, "Did you weigh it? Maybe if you weighed it—"

"Oh, it lost, all right," I admitted. "When I connected the batteries, the needle on the scale dropped down to zero, and stopped there. And I found that I could lift the machine into the air, and it'd stay where it was put, just whistling and whirling its cones. But then it started to settle." I beckoned him back inside.

"Settle? Why?" Artie asked.

"Dust," I said. "There's always a little dust settling out of the air. It doesn't weigh *much*, but it made the machine weigh at least what the dust-weight equalled, and down it went. Slow and easy, but down."

Artie looked at the gadget, sitting and whistling on the floor of the lab, then turned a bleak-but-still-hopeful glance my way. "Maybe—If we could make a *guy* take on a cone-shape, and whirled him—"

"Sure," I muttered. "Bend over, grab his ankles, and fly anywhere in the world, with his torso and legs pivoting wildly around his peaked behind." I shook my head. "Besides the manifestly undignified posturing involved, we have to consider the other effects; like having his eyeballs fly out."

"If—If we had a bunch of men lie in a circle around a kind of Maypole-thing, each guy clutching the ankles of the next one . . ."

"Maybe they'd be weightless, but they *still* wouldn't go *up*," I said. "Unless they could be towed, somehow. And by the time they landed, they'd be too nauseous to be of any use for at least three days. Always assuming, of course, that the weak-wristed member of the sick circlet didn't lose his grip, and have them end up playing mid-air crack-the-whip before they fell."

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"So all right, it's got a couple of bugs!" said Artie. "But the principle's sound, right?"

"Well—Yeah, there you got me, Artie. The thing *cancels* weight, anyhow . . ."

"Swell. So we work from there," He rubbed his hands together joyously. "And who knows what we'll come up with."

"*We* never do, that's for sure," I mumbled.

But Artie just shrugged. "I like surprises," he said.

THE end of the day—me working, Artie inventing—found us with some new embellishments for the machine. Where it was originally a sort of humped metal box (the engine went inside the hump) studded with toothbrush-bristle rows of counter-revolving cones (lest elementary torque send the machine swinging the other way, and thus destroy the thrust-effect of the cones), it now had an additional feature: A helical flange around each cone.

"You see," Artie explained, while I was torching them to order from plate metal, "the helices will provide *lift* as the cones revolve."

"Only in the atmosphere of the planet," I said.

"Sure, I know. But by the time the outer limits of the air are reached, the machine, with the same mass-thrust, will have less gravity-drag to fight, being that much farther from the Earth. The effect will be cumulative. The higher it gets, the more outward thrust it'll generate. Then nothing'll stop it!"

"You could be right," I admitted, hammering out helix after helix on an electric anvil (another gadget of Artie's; the self-heating anvil (The Thermovil) had begun life as a small inspiration in Artie's mind for a portable toaster).

It was just after sunset when we figured the welds were cool enough so we could test it. Onto the scale it went again, I flicked the toggle, and we stood back to watch the needle as the cones picked up speed. Along with the original whistling sound made by the cones we began to detect a shriller noise, one which abruptly became a genuine pain in the ear. As Artie and I became somewhat busy with screaming (the only thing we could think of on the spur of the moment to counteract the terrible waves of noise assaulting our tympana), it was all at once much easier to see the needle of the scale dropping toward zero, as the glass disc facing the dial dissolved into gritty powder, along with the glass panes in every window in the lab, the house, the heliport, and the movie theatre. (Not to mention those of a few farmhouses a couple of miles down the high-

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way, but we didn't find that out till their lawyers showed up with bills for damages.)

Sure enough, though, the thing lifted. Up it bobbed, like a metal dirigible with agonizing gas pains, shrieking louder by the second. When the plaster started to trickle and flake from the walls, and the fillings in my teeth rose to a temperature just short of incandescence, I decided it was time to cancel this phase of the experiment, and, with very little regret, I flung a blanket-like canvas tarpaulin up and over the ascending machine before it started using its helices to screw into the ceiling. The cones bit into the tarpaulin, tangled, jammed, and the machine—mercifully noiseless, now—crashed back onto the scale, and lost a lot of symmetry and a couple of rivets.

"What's Plan C?" I said to Artie.

"*Quiet!*" he said, either because I'd interrupted his thinking or because that was our next goal.

THE next four days were spent in the arduous and quite tricky business of reaming acoustically spaced holes along the flanges. Artie's theory was that if we simply ("simply" was his word, not mine) fixed it so that the sound made by each flange (anything whirly with a hole or two in it is bound to make a calculated noise) was of the proper number of vibrations to intermesh with the compression/rarefaction phases of the sounds made by the other flanges, a veritable sphere of silence would be thereby created, since there'd be no room for any sound waves to pass through the already crowded atmosphere about the machine.

"It'll make less noise than a mouse in sneakers drooling on a blotter!" enthused Artie, when I had it rigged again, and ready to go.

"Still," I said uncertainly, "whether we *hear* it or not, all that soundwave-energy has to do *something*, Artie. If it turns ultrasonic, we may suddenly find ourselves in a showerbath of free electrons and even *worse* subatomic particles from disrupted air molecules. Or the lab might turn molten on us. Or—"

"Oh, turn it *on*, Burt!" said Artie. "That's just a chance we have to take."

"Don't see why we *have* to take it . . ." I groused, but I'm as curious as the next man, so I turned it on. (I could have arranged to do it by remote control, except for two pressing deterrents: One—At a remote point of control, I wouldn't be able to watch what, if anything, the machine did, and Two—Who knows where the *safe* spot is

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where sound-waves are concerned? With some sonic forces, you're safer the *nearer* you get to the source.) So, like I said, I turned it on.

Silence. Beautiful, blissful, silence. There before us twirled the rows of shiny cones, lifting slowly into the air, and there was nothing to hear at all. Beside me, Artie's lips moved, but I couldn't catch a syllable. This time around, we'd looped a rope through a few metal grommets in the base of the machine, and as it rose, Artie slipped the trailing ends under his arms from behind, and proceeded to lash it across his chest, to test the thing's lift-power. As he fumbled with the knot, I shouted at him, "Use a firm hitch!"

NOTHING came out, but Artie wasn't a bad lip-reader. He scowled, and his lips made a *"What?!"* motion, so I repeated my caution. Next thing I knew, he was taking a poke at me, and I, to fend him off, ended up wrestling on the floor with him, while the untended machine burred its way into the ceiling, until the engine overheated and burned away the electrical insulation on the wires, and the machine, plus a good two feet square of lab-ceiling, once more descended to demolish the scale.

"—your language!" Artie was snarling, as sound returned.

"All I said was 'Use a firm hitch!'" I pleaded, trying to shove his shins off my floor-pinned biceps.

Artie stared at me, then rocked off my prostrate body, convulsed in a fit of laughter. "Say it silently in front of a mirror, sometime," he choked out. Before I had time to see what he was talking about, I smelled smoke, above and beyond that engendered by the scorched insulation.

I ran to the door, and opened it to observe the last glowing, crackling timbers of the house, the theatre, and the heliport vanish into hot orange sparks, in the grip of a dandy ring of fire that —in a seventy-yard path—had burned up everything in a sixty-five to hundred-thirty-five yard radius of the lab.

"I told you those sound-waves had to do something," I said. "Ready to give up?"

But Artie was already staring at the debris around the scale and making swift notes on a memo pad . . .

IT looks awfully damned complex—" I hedged, eight days later, looking at the repaired, refurbished, and amended gadget on the table. "Remember, Artie, the more parts to an invention, the more things can go wrong with it. In geometric progression . . ."

"Unh-uh," he shook his head.

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"Not the more parts, Burt. The more *moving* parts. All we've done is added a parabolic sound-reflector, to force all the waves the cones make down through a tube in the middle of the machine. And we've insulated the tube to keep extraneous vibration from shattering it with super-induced metal fatigue."

"Yeah," I said, "but about that *insulation*, Artie—"

"You got a *better* idea?" he snapped. "We tried rubber; it charred and flaked away. We tried plastics; they bubbled, melted, extruded, or burned. We tried metal and mineral honeycombs; they distorted, incandesced, fused or vaporized. Ceramic materials shattered. Fabrics tore, or petrified and cracked. All the regular things failed us. So what's wrong with trying something new?"

"Nothing, Artie, nothing. But —*Cornflakes?*"

"Well, we sogged 'em down good with water, right? And they've still got enough interstices between the particles to act as sound-baffles, right? And by the time they get good and hot and dry, they'll cook onto the metal, right? (Ask anyone who ever tried to clean a pot after scorching cereal just how hard they'll stick!) And even when most of them flake away, the random distribution of char will circumvent any chance the sound-waves have of setting up the regular pulse-beat necessary to fatigue the metal in the tube, okay?"

"Yeah, sure, Artie, it's okay, but—*Cornflakes?*"

"I take it your objections are less scientific than they are esthetic?" he inquired.

"Well, something like that," I admitted. "I mean, aw—For pete's sake, Artie! The patent office'll laugh at us. They'll start referring us to the copyright people, as inventors of cookbooks!"

"Maybe not," he said philosophically. "The thing *still* may not *work*, you know."

"Well, *there's* one bright spot, anyhow!" I agreed, fiddling with the starting switch. "So okay, I'm game if you are."

"Let 'er rip," he pontificated, and I flicked the switch.

IT worked beautifully. Not even a faint hum. The only way we could tell it was working was from the needle on the—rebuilt again—scale, as it dropped lazily down to the zero mark. Our ears didn't sting, no glass went dusting into crystalline powder, and a quick peek through the door showed no ring of fire surrounding the lab.

"We may just have *done* it!" I said, hopefully, as the silver-nosed machine began to float upward (We hadn't *had* to mount

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the parabolic reflector in the position of a nose-cone, but it made the thing look neater, somehow.)

It seemed a little torpid in its ascent, but that could be credited to the extra weight of the reflector and cornflakes, not to mention the fact that the helices had to suck all their air in under the lip of the silvery nose-cone before they could thrust properly. But its rise was steady. Six inches, ten inches—

Then, at precisely one foot in height, something unexpected happened. Under the base of the machine, where the sound-heated air was at its most torrid, a shimmering disc-like thing began to materialize, and warp, and hollow out slightly, and beside it, a glinting metal rod-thing flattened at one end, then the flat end went concave in the center and kind of oval about the perimeter, and something brownish and shreddy plopped and hissed into the now-very-concave disc-like thing.

"Artie—!" I said, uneasily, but by then, he, too, had recognized the objects for what they were.

"Burt—" he said excitedly. "Do you realize what we've done? We've invented a *syntheticizer!*"

Even as he was saying it, the objects completed their mid-air materialization (time: five seconds, start to finish), and clattered and clinked onto the scale. We stood and looked down at them: A bowl of cornflakes and a silver spoon.

"How—?" I said, but Artie was already figuring it out, aloud.

"It's the sound-waves," he said. "At ultrasonic, molecule-disrupting vibrations, they're doing just what that Philosopher's Stone was supposed to: Transmuting. Somehow, we didn't clean out the reflector sufficiently, and some of the traces of our other trial insulations remained inside. The ceramics formed the bowl, the metals formed the spoon, the cornflakes formed the cornflakes!"

"But," I said logically (or as logically as could be expected under the circumstances), "what about the rubber, or the fabrics?"

ARTIE'S face lit up, and he nodded toward the machine, still hovering at one foot above the scale. In its wake, amid the distorting turbulence of the sound-tortured air, two more objects were materializing: a neatly folded damask napkin, and a small rubber toothpick. As they dropped down to join their predecessors, the machine gave a satisfied shake, and rose steadily to the two-foot level. I was scribbling frantically in my notebook: *Bowl + cereal + spoon: 5 seconds. Lag: 10 seconds. Napkin*

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+ *toothpick: 3 seconds. Total synthesizing time: 18 seconds. Allowance for rise of machine per foot: 2 seconds.*

"Burt—!" Artie yelled joyously, just as I completed the last item, "Look at that, will you?!"

I looked, and had my first presentiment of disaster. At two feet, the machine was busily fabricating—out of the air molecules themselves, for all I knew—*two* bowls, *two* spoons, and *two* bowlfuls of cereal.

"Hey, Artie—" I began, but he was too busy figuring out this latest development.

"It's the altimeter," he said. "We had it gauged by the foot, but it's taking the numerical calibrations as a kind of output-quota, instead!"

"Look, Artie," I interrupted, as twin napkins and toothpicks dropped down beside the new bowls on the table where the scale lay. "We're going to have a little problem—"

"You're telling *me!*" he sighed, unhappily. "All those damned *random* factors! How many times did the machine have to be repaired after each faulty test! What thickness of ceramics, or fabric, or rubber, or metal remained! What was the precise distribution and dampness of each of those soggy cornflakes! Hell, Burt, we may be *forever* trying to make a duplicate of this!"

"Artie—" I said, as three toothpick-napkin combinations joined the shattered remains of triple bowl-cereal-spoon disasters from the one-yard mark over the scale, "that is *not* the problem I had in mind."

"Oh?" he said, as four shimmering discs began to coalesce and shape themselves. "What, then?"

"It's not that I don't appreciate the side-effect benefits of free cornflake dinners," I said, speaking carefully and somberly, to hold his attention. "But isn't it going to put a crimp in our anti-gravity machine sales? Even at a mere mile in height, it means that the spot beneath it is due for a deluge of five-thousand-two-hundred-eighty bowls of cornflakes. Not to mention all those toothpicks, napkins and spoons!"

Artie's face went grave. "Not to mention the five-thousand-two-hundred-seventy-nine of the same that the spot beneath would get from the gadget when it was just one foot *short* of the mile!"

"Of course," I said, calculating rapidly as the five-foot mark produced a neat quintet of everything, a quintet which crashed noisily onto the ten lookalikes below it as the machine bobbed silently to the six-foot mark. "we have one interesting thing in our favor: the time element."

"How so?" said Artie, craning over my shoulder to try and read

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my lousy calligraphics on the pad.

"WELL," I said, pointing to each notation in turn, 'the first batch, bowl-to-toothpick, took twenty seconds, if we include the time-lapse while the machine was ascending to the one-foot mark."

"Uh-huh," he nodded. "I see. So?"

"So the second batch took double. Forty seconds. Not only did it require thirty-six seconds for the formation of the stuff, it took the machine twice as many seconds to reach the two-foot mark."

"I get it," he said. "So I suppose it took three times the base number for the third batch?"

"Right. A full minute. And the materialization of the objects is —Boy, that's noisy!" I interrupted myself as batch number six came smashing down. "—always at a point where the objects fit into a theoretical conical section below the machine."

"How's that again?" said Artie.

"Well, bowl number one formed just below the exhaust vent of the central cylinder. Bowls two and three, or—if you prefer—bowl-batch two, formed about six inches lower, edge to edge, at the cross-section of an imaginary cone (whose rather truncated apex is the exhaust vent) that seems to form a vertical angle of thirty degrees."

"In other words," said Artie, "each new formation comes in a spot beneath this cone where it's possible for the new formations to materialize side-by-side, right?" When I nodded, he said, "Fine. But so what?"

"It means that each new materialization occurs at a steadily increasing height, but one which—" I calculated briefly on the pad "—is never greater than two-thirds the height of the machine itself."

Artie looked blank. "Thank you very kindly for the math lesson," he said finally, "but I still don't see what you are driving at, Burt. How does this present a problem?"

I pointed toward the un-repaired hole in the lab ceiling, where the machine, after dutifully disgorging the number-seven load, was slowly heading. "It means that unless we grab that thing before it gets too much higher, the whole damn planet'll be up to its ears in cornflakes. And the one-third machine-height gap between artifacts and machine means that we can't even use the mounding products to climb on and get it. We'd always be too low, and an *increasing* too-low at that!"

"Are you trying to say, in your roundabout mathematical way, let's grab that thing, fast?"

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"Right," I said, glad I had gotten through to him. "I would've said as much sooner, only you never listen until somebody supplies you with all the pertinent data on a crisis first."

LOAD number nine banged and splintered down into the lab, bringing the cumulative total of bowl - cereal - spoon - napkin-toothpick debris up to forty-five.

"Come on, Burt," said Artie. "We'll have to get to the roof of the lab. There's a ladder up at the—"

He'd been going to say "house", but realized that there wasn't a house anymore. "Quick!" he rasped, anxiously. "We can still get there by—" He stopped before saying "helicopter", for similar reasons.

"Burt—" he said, after a pause that allowed the total to rise to fifty-five with a crash. "What'll we *do?*"

"As usual with your inventions," I said, "we get on the phone and alert the government."

"The phone," said Burt, his face grey, "was in the house."

I felt the hue of my face match his, then. "The car," I blurted. "We'll have to drive someplace where there's a phone!"

We ran out of the lab, dodged a few flying shards of pottery that sprayed out after us from load-eleven-total-sixty-six, and roared off down the road in Artie's roadster. He did the driving, I kept my eyes on my watch, timing the arrivals of each new load. (Formula: *n x 20 = lag between loads in seconds*)

By the time Artie discovered we were out of gas in the middle of a deserted country road, load number twenty had fallen.

By the time we arrived on foot at the nearest farmhouse, and were ordered off the property by the irate farmer who still had bare boards on his windowless house, and a shotgun in his gnarled brown hands, load twenty-five had fallen.

By the time we hitchhiked into town and got on the phone in time to find all the governmental agencies had closed their offices for the day, load thirty had fallen.

By the time we finally convinced the Washington Operator that this was a national emergency that could *not* (though she kept suggesting it) be handled by the ordinary Civil Defense members (the town had a population of two hundred, and a one-percent enrolment in CD. Those two guys wouldn't be any more help than we were, ourselves.), and were able to locate Artie's congressional contact (he was out at a movie), load fifty had dropped, and I was bone-tired, and it was (since load fifty took a thousand seconds to form, load one had taken twenty, and their

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total—one thousand twenty seconds—divided by two made an average formulation-time of five hundred ten seconds per formulation) over seven hours since that first bowl had started to appear, and my mind, whether I wanted it to or not, gave me the distressing information that by now Artie's estate was cluttered with a numbing totality of one-thousand - two - hundred - seventy-five bowl-cereal-spoon-napkin-toothpick sets. And fifty-one more due in seventeen minutes.

"WHAT'S he say?" I asked Artie, leaning into the phone booth.

"He thinks I'm drunk!" Artie groaned, slamming down the receiver. "I only wish I were!"

I gave a stoical shrug, and pointed to the bright red neon lure across the street. "Don't just stand there wishing. Join me?" I started across toward the bar.

"But Burt—" Artie babbled, hurrying along beside me. "We can't just *forget* about it . . ."

"We did our bit," I said. "You told your contact, right? Well, by tomorrow morning, when the total is up to over three thousand (I calculated five-thousand-fifty sets by the time the machine reaches the hundred-foot mark, a little better than twenty-eight hours from the starting time), somebody's sure to notice all the birds in the region, if only an ornithologist, and—"

"Birds?"

"Eating the cornflakes," I said, and when he nodded in comprehension, went on, "—pretty soon the word'll get to the government."

"Or," said Artie, hopefully, "the batteries and engine'll wear out . . . Won't they?"

"It's a radium-powered motor," I said, as we slipped into the coolness of a booth at the rear of the bar. "The power-source will deplete itself by half in about six hundred years, maybe. Meantime, what'll we do with all those cornflakes?"

The waiter came by and we ordered two beers.

"Wait—" said Artie, gripping my sleeve. "As the machine reaches the upper atmosphere, the sound-waves'll thin out, weaken, as the medium grows scarce."

"Sure," I said, prying my cuff free of his fingers, "so we only get bombarded with *badly made* artifacts by the time the thing gets ten miles up. But that's about fifty-thousand artifacts per foot rise, Artie, at that height! No, I take that back. Fifty thousand *sets!* And at five items per set (if we don't count the precise number of flakes per batch of cereal), we have twenty-five thousand items per foot per batch, merely a *rough* estimate!"

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The beers came, and we ordered two more, the orders to keep coming until we said whoa.

YOU know," said Artie, after draining half the bottle, "I just had a horrible thought—"

"Horrible above and beyond the *present* horrors?" I said, horrified.

He nodded, thoughtfully. "What happens to anything that gets sucked into the machine under the lip of the reflector? Does the machine just use it as more raw material . . . Or does it start duplicating *that?*"

"Holy hell!" I choked. "As if there weren't too many pigeons already!"

"There's no room for a pigeon to fit under that lip," said Artie, patting the back of my hand as though he thought it was soothing me (it wasn't), "or any other bird, for that matter. What I was thinking of was stuff like nits and gnats and mosquitoes and —"

"Stop!" I shuddered, reaching for my beer and finding the bottle empty. I looked for the waiter, but he was at the front window, watching a crowd that was gathering in the street. They were looking in the direction of the lab. It was a few miles away, of course, but that machine was—if on time, and why shouldn't it be? —due to deliver fifty-two sets just about now, and even a few miles away, fifty-two bowl-spoon-napkin-toothpick-cereal combinations, shimmering in the air as they took form, would be hard to miss if you were looking in the right direction. I said as much to Artie, but he shook his head.

"It's ten o'clock of a moonless night, Burt. They couldn't see a damned thing, unless there were some kind of illumination—" I saw by his face that he'd thought of a possible source.

"What?" I said.

"Fireflies?" he hypothesized weakly.

WE got out of the booth and joined our waiter as he hurried out into the street. And there, in the distant blackness of the skies, was a sight like a Fourth of July celebration gone berserk. From the number of those fireflies, I figure the first one got sucked in at about the fifteen mark, and possibly a few of his pals with him.

"Despite everything—" said Artie, softly, "it sure is beautiful."

"A gorgeous sight," I had to agree. "But—What the hell is that thing in the air under the fireflies? You can just make it out in the reflected flashes. It kind of looks like the—the *lab* . . ."

Artie's fingers sank into my forearm. "But. It *is* the lab! Not *the* lab, but another like it! With

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all those falling bowls and things, enough plaster-dust and wood-splinters and glass-spicules must've been sucked in to let the machine make a dupl—*There it goes!*"

A one-story building dropping from a height of around thirty feet onto another one-story building covered over with spoons, crunchy cereal, and broken pottery makes much more racket than can be absorbed by the cushioning effect of thousands of napkins and rubber toothpicks. We were a few miles off, so the sound—when it finally got to us—was muted by distance, but it was still a lulu.

"And to think," Artie murmured, "that this is happening because we tried to make it *noiseless!*"

"What I'm worried about," I said sickly, "is that new cloud of dust rising from the latest debris. There are crumbs of *two* smashed buildings in it, Artie. And in roughly twenty minutes the process is going to repeat, and there'll be crumbs from *four* labs in the air; two labs that'll be the second duplicate of the original, and two that'll be the first duplicate of the original-plus-first-duplicate!"

Artie shook his head sadly. "Crumbs from *six*, Burt. Remember, when those four new labs fall in twenty minutes, they're going to raise dust from the wreckage of the two *already* on the ground!"

"Maybe," I said, less lackadaisically than I'd spoken when we left the phone booth for the bar, "you'd better get your man in Washington, again."

"He'll never believe I'm sober, *now!*" Artie complained.

"Oops—Never mind, Artie," I said, resignedly, looking at the latest development in the distant sky. "He'll get the word indirectly, from the forest rangers."

"Huh?" said Artie, and looked toward the machine.

AMID the sparking cloud of fireflies, fluttering cornflakes, glinting spoons, and a foursome of hazy, still-processing new labs, there was a newcomer to the chaos. Something in one of the plunging artifacts must have rubbed something else the wrong way, made a spark, and—Well, the machine was complacently sucking in raw blazing energy, now, tongue upon tongue of orange flame and black, spiralling smoke that rose from the pyre of shattered synthetics. It was the first geometrically cone-shaped blaze I'd ever seen in my life, but that suction was going pretty good, now. And all that glaring heat was going to be suddenly re-created going in the *other* direction in about twenty minutes. But—

"Flames go *up*," said Artie,

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his thought-processes apparently running parellel to mine. "So the new fires . . ."

"Will be sucked in with the next batch," I finished. "And come out double-strength next time around."

"Burt—" said Artie, "What's the temperature at which water breaks down into free hydrogen and oxygen again?"

"A little less than the melting point of iron," I said. "Figure about fifteen hundred degrees Centigrade. Why?"

"I just wondered if perhaps the machine might not only double the amount of the fire, but its temperature as well . . ."

I didn't *want* to theorize about *that*. It was summer, and the air was pretty humid, and that meant an awful lot of free hydrogen and oxygen, all at once, ready to re-combine explosively in the heat from the flames that had separated them in the first place, thence to become disrupted again, thence to explode again . . . The mind refuses certain contemplations. I turned away from the chaotic display in the distant skies, and said to Artie, "How's chances of the *machine* getting melted down?"

He shook his head with great sadness. "We made it out of damn near heat-proof metals, remember? So it wouldn't burn up at entry speeds from outer space?"

"Oh, yeah," I said. "So what'll we do, now?"

He glanced at the increasing holocaust on the horizon. "Pray for rain?"

WELL, that was yesterday. Today, as I write this, the government has finally gotten wind of the thing, and the area is under martial law. Not that all those uniformed men standing just out of heat-range about the ever-increasing perimeter are going to be of much help. Maybe to keep the crowds back, they'd help, except no one in his right mind is heading any direction but away from the mound. A few trees went up in smoke during the blaze, too, and now, every *n*-times-twenty seconds, a whole uprooted forest is joining the crash.

No one knows quite what to do about it. The best weapon we possess is Artie's inadvertent disintegrator pistol (remember Venus?), and ever since the Three Day War, they've been banned. There's a proposition up before Congress to un-ban the things and blast the machine, of course, but the opposition keeps putting the kibosh on things by simply asking, "What if the machine doesn't vanish? And what if, during the attempted shooting, it starts duplicating disintegrator-beams?"

The vote was negative.

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We figure it'll take quite a few years before the machine gets beyond the point where the atmosphere stops acting as a medium for the sound-waves. And that, of course, is only if the machine isn't duplicating the atmosphere, too. And why couldn't it be?

In the meantime, the avian population in the region is on the increase, thanks to all those cornflakes-and-firefly dinners. Not to mention the birds the machine has started to produce since a few foolish sparrows got incinerated in the blaze.

Artie figures that if enough snow falls on the machine, it may weight it down and stop the process. So far, that's the only hope we have. Meantime, it's still the middle of June.

It looks like a long summer.

THE END

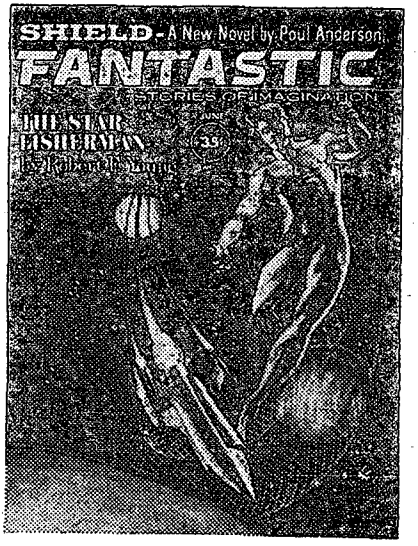
COMING NEXT MONTH

A new Poul Anderson novel, *Shield*, is featured the June issue of FANTASTIC.

It is the story of a youngster, just back from the stars, who alone carries the knowledge of a weapon that can make a brave new world—or destroy an evil old one.

The second part of June FANTASTIC'S one-two-three punch is a long novelet by **Robert F. Young,** *The Star Fisherman,* that is at once exciting and moving. It is the tale of a man who pursues his love through the reaches of space and time until he, himself, becomes a legend.

Punch three is the Fantasy Reprint—**Robert Bloch's** *The Past Master.*



You will not want to miss the June issue of FANTASTIC. Reserve your copy at your newsstand now. On sale May 22.

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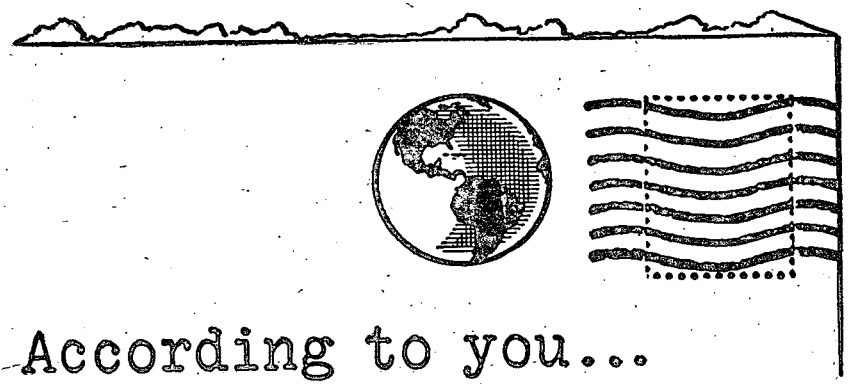

According to you...

Dear Editor:

I have read a good many detective novels and equally appreciable numbers of sf novels over the past year and am a fan of both forms of literature. However, I must admit that the appearance of the name Erle Stanley Gardner is the only reason that I ever purchased the January issue of FANTASTIC. Nevertheless I was disappointed with "The Human Zero." As a mystery and detective novelet, this story, in my opinion, outshines some of Gardner's "Perry Mason" novels; but as an sf thriller, it was a complete flop. Perhaps I have reached this opinion because the story *did* possess that detective story element; still this does not alter my opinion. However, I would appreciate another Gardner novel to appear in FANTASTIC. But would like *this* one to be pure science fiction, without the detective bit. As far as I can see—the two don't mix.

"Hepcats of Venus" was good among the novelets; but "This Is Your Death" was strictly from "no-wheresville."

On the short story list, I rate "The Emphatic Man" as an sf "first" in suspense. What an ending! In my estimation, the type of ending that leaves a reader "hanging," to form his own conclusions, is a noteworthy achievement in an author's style. My compliments to Gordon Browne.

Roarke's "Atonement" was very good also. And the ironic twist in Dellinger's "Rat Race" was simply a terrific and respect-inspiring accomplishment in science fiction writing.

Since this is the first time I have read a FANTASTIC publication, I do not consider myself to have the authority to judge this particular issue in comparison

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with another issue. However, it has inspired me to buy the next issue that appears on the stands. And, believe me, coming from an anti-magazine reader like me, that's a compliment!

M. M. Marshall
1816 Sybil Lane
Tyler, Texas

● *We're hoping to get another Gardner that will have more fantasy emphasis; but getting a Gardner with no detection at all is like finding a cherry pie without cherries.*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I would like to become involved in the David R. Bunch controversy as a non-combatant.

First, there have been no Bunch stories in FANTASTIC since "A Small Miracle of Fishhooks and Straight Pins." This, with "The Problem was Lubrication," "Last Zero" and "We Regret" compose all that he has written in FANTASTIC in the last year. Yet these four stories have caused more argument than all others combined. This must surely indicate there is something attractive about the stories; FANTASTIC has printed mediocre stories before and brought no comment. The people who have written against Bunch have called that author's—("and I use the term doubtfully")—work "trash, utter rot and tripe" and opined that it "reads like something written by a mental patient or a moron" all within the *same* letter, later condemned as inane babbling, as it was. Mrs. Stewart gives no reason for her dislike of Bunch.

Then Mr. Pashow admits he liked "Fishhooks" and asks what it can mean.

Miss Imms likens Bunch to comic-book writers. She does not give reasons for disliking Bunch.

Mr. Turner writes a childishly witty letter, stating that he has furthermore come to the conclusion that Mr. Greco is Bunch's grandmother, an altogether remarkable feat. The general insinuation is that anyone who likes Bunch must be prejudiced. Mr. Turner gives no reasons for his dislike of Bunch.

Nobody gives his reason for disliking Bunch. Nobody gives his reason for liking Bunch.

As for myself, I can take Bunch or leave him. But his stories are not as bad as many others FANTASTIC prints. There has been a lot of shouting back and forth about Bunch but no one has made any intelligent statements on either side.

David J. Hildreth
304 Bell Road
Palmyra, New Jersey

● *Maybe we ought to get a letter from Bunch himself giving his views on this minor tempest?*

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Dear Editor:

The story by Fritz Leiber in the February issue of FANTASTIC, in my opinion, is one of the best of its kind that I have ever read. It was very similar to stories written by H. P. Lovecraft (a high compliment). The story gives you the same chilling feeling that Lovecraft's stories do, but while H.P.L. gives you a feeling of happening long ago, Leiber's is frighteningly modern. As if it could happen to you. Let's see more stories by Leiber, especially about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser.

Lawrence D. Kafka
4418 Bruner Ave.
Bronx 66, N.Y.

● *A Mouser story coming up in a couple of months that explains his mysterious origins.*

Dear Editor:

I would like, in this letter, to pay tribute to an author, whom, I think has been long neglected by all sf readers. This author is one Dan Galouye.

His stories never fail to intrigue me, and I consider it an event when one of them is featured in a magazine, especially FANTASTIC.

H. L. Gold once said that he despised stories dealing with "Ugh, who discovers how to make fire or to chip flint . . ." but Galouye's "The Trekkers" (Sept. FANTASTIC) was fresh and very much entertaining . . . and I *had* agreed with Gold!

Then came Dec. with its "Spawn of Doom," nothing spectacular but I gladly part with 35¢ for a story of this quality and interest.

His recent "A Silence of Wings" (Feb. FANTASTIC) was well constructed and admirably written. Too bad it didn't rate a cover.

My point is this: If Poul Anderson had written, say "Spawn of Doom" your mailbag would have been laden with paeons of praise for that same issue, but with the author's name as it was, well . . .

Ken Winkes
Arlington, Wash.

● *Increasing numbers of readers are praising Mr. Galouye, which we think is a well-deserved trend.*

Dear Editor:

Out of curiosity, may I ask; out of all the manuscripts that are sent to you by mail, how many of them receive more than a cursory glance at the first few pages before being packed with a rejection slip and sent back? According to one leading publisher, the chances of getting a manuscript accepted are over a hundred to one, against. And if a story were to be accepted, by

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a writer, how much would he get per word as compared with a professional science fiction writer?

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

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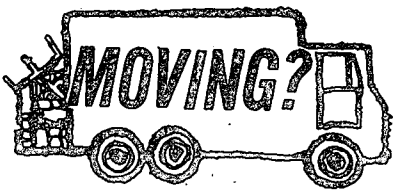
Dear Editor:

I was greatly interested in Feb. FANTASTIC because of the story "The Shadow Out of Space," by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth. My husband and I were close personal friends of the late H. P. Lovecraft. This year marks the 25th anniversary of Lovecraft's death, which occurred March 15, 1937. He is interred in beautiful Swan Point Cemetery, Providence's finest, most exclusive burying-ground. We often visit the grave of this unusually gifted author of the macabre.

I would be pleased to hear personally from any Lovecraft fans. I have plenty of time and will answer all letters if a stamp is enclosed.

Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy
688 Prairie Ave.
Providence 5, R.I.



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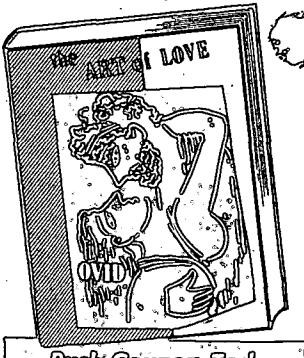

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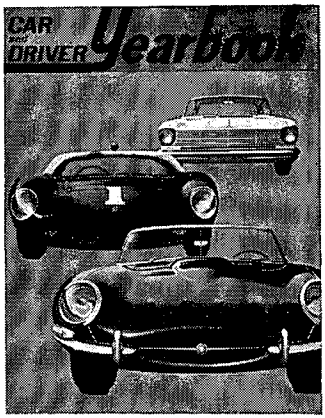

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